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**ISSTIP JOURNAL** ISSN 1478-1204  
**Number 13** **Autumn 2005**

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ISSTIP JOURNAL  
Free to members  
  
Copies of ISSTIP Journal  
Nos 1-13 at £3.50 per issue

ISSTIP MEMBERSHIP  
Full £20.00  
Members of ISM etc £15.00  
Students £5.00

Published by ISSTIP  
International Society for  
Study of Tension in Performance  
Registered Charity No 328203

Printed by:  
Burchell design and print  
Littlehampton, West Sussex  
Tel. 01903 717633

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# Editorial

ISSTIP is continuing its pioneering work in the field of Performing Arts Medicine, setting up the first INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE OF PERFORMING ARTS MEDICINE

Consultant *Professor Earl Owen*

Director *Carola Grindea*

Assistant Directors *Dr Fiona Clarey* and *Dr Karenni Caun* (Manchester)

The launching of the Institute, on 30th September 2005 at the Royal Society of Musicians, (by kind permission of Maggie Gibb) 10 Stratford Place, London W1N 9AE from 12.00 to 2.30 pm. marks another ISSTIP achievement.

The first SEMINAR will be held at Thames Valley University Faculty of Arts (former London College of Music and Media) which will be opened by *Prof Earl Owen* with a presentation on his work on 'Musicians Wellness', followed by Music Medicine Therapists assisting *Carola Grindea*, Clinical Work with participants. Two other SEMINARS will be held monthly, on November 13th and December 4th 2005. Further dates to be announced.

This is a very ambitious project and is making an impact on the Musical and Medical Professions in the UK and in Europe. *Dr Karenni Caun* has set up a Centre in Manchester, with *Dr David Fielding*, GP, BAPAM representative and with *Delyth Wilkinson*, Psychologist. In Europe, several Centres are already active: *Professor Nancy Lee Harper*, University of Aveiro, Portugal; *Prof Elin Persson*, Kristiansund Opera House Norway; in Russia, *Prof Irina Ossipova*, Tchaikovsky Conservatory, Moscow, and *Prof Galina Minsker*, University of Arts St Petersburg; in Slovenia, *Damjana Zupan*, Ljubljana School of Music; in Cyprus, *Katerina Antoniou*, Director Academy of Arts, Larnaka.

*Nancy Lee Harper* organises the first SEMINAR on "Care of the Professional Voice" on 26th and 27th

October, when medical specialists and musicians will take part in discussions.

It is good to see that in the UK, several Music Colleges are incorporating courses on 'Health and the Musicians' in their under/post graduate curricula: Royal College of Music presents regular workshops; an intensive ISSTIP Course was held at Trinity College of Music (August 2004); while the former LCMM - now Faculty of Arts, Thames Valley University- has included a Module, as part of the curriculum of undergraduate students. A Postgraduate Degree has been validated by the Thames Valley University which will start in the autumn. Royal Northern College of Music is committed to these studies, a SEMINAR was organised last May and an ISSTIP Round Table was held on 2nd September when *Prof Gail Berenson*, Director Centre of Wellness at Ohio University, USA, Chaired the discussions.

ISSTIP NEW COURSE for TEACHERS devised by *Dr Karenni Caun*, Psychologist *Andy Evans*, *Dr Fiona Clarey* and *Emma Peake*, will hold sessions at the Royal Society of Musicians (10 Stratford Place, London W1). Dates and format to be announced.

The Faculty of the Institute includes a most distinguished medical team with specialists in the field of Music Medicine, psychologists, physiotherapists and musicians from the UK and overseas. They are assisted by the newly trained Performing Arts Medicine Therapists, as well as by teachers of Yoga, Alexander and Feldenkrais.

The goals of the Institute are expanding beyond ISSTIP's past activities such as promoting research, distributing information, organising conferences, seminars, workshops, publishing ISSTIP JOURNAL, quarterly NEWSLETTERS and helping musicians and other performers at the ISSTIP Performing Arts Clinic.

It proposes to set up a Bibliographical Library and, ultimately, to publish the valuable Dissertations written by the Performing Arts Medicine Therapists.

Throughout the academic year 2005, ISSTIP organised MONTHLY SEMINARS on 'Health and the Performing Arts', incorporating the Performing Arts Clinic. These have been most successful, particularly after a glowing article published in the British Medical Association NEWS which brought another group of doctors interested to learn how to cope with their patients problems.

In this issue of the ISSTIP JOURNAL No 13 we are publishing several articles by ISSTIP members and by the Music Medicine Therapists on topics of their Dissertations: *Nancy Lee Harper* on 'Zoning - in: The Peak Experience or the Flow in Musical Performance'; *Damjana Zupan* on 'The Role of a Free Neck for a Liberated Performance'; *Cat Jary*, cellist and Alexander Technique teacher, on 'Alexander Technique and Musicians'; *Dr Daniel Lasserson*, research Neurologist, has written an article on 'Music in Mind and Brain' based on his presentation at the ISSTIP Course; *Kaarina Ollila*, a Finnish singer and Voice Trainer on 'Breathing Exercises to enhance the Performance', *Elin Persson*, on her activities as piano teacher, accompanist and conductor at the Opera House Kristiansund, Norway. An interesting article by *John Sutton*, an American pianist who developed Focal Dystonia in his right hand as a student, thus had to change his career. He worked as a policeman for nearly 20 years but always hoped to go back to his beloved instrument. Indeed, he obtained (via internet) the VIDEO of *Carola Grindea* Piano Technique with the additional VIDEO on Focal

Dystonia, he taught himself following lesson by lesson the video with its Explanatory Brochure, and now he is able to play again. In his words, he has achieved 50% progress and hopes to conquer his dystonia in a not too distant future when he comes to London for a short course with *Carola*; a short article by *Alan Fraser*, pianist and Feldenkrais teacher, on discovering the value of 'arm weight and relaxation' in his piano playing. Last, but not least, *Dr Michael Lasserson's* note 'A New Kind of Medicine' - addressing orchestral players physical problems.

We wish to acknowledge the setting up of ISSTIP new web by *Paul Lanfear* and *Steven Rodman* <[www.isstip.org](http://www.isstip.org)> having designed a fine and varied display with a great deal of information. Thank you, boys.

*The Editor*

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# Professor Earl Owen

*in conversation with Dr. Fiona Clarey*

**FC** Professor Owen, You are known as the Father of Microsurgery, and are famous for the first hand transplant and double hand transplant in 2000, but I understand that you originally intended to become a concert pianist.

**EO** At school I studied Piano with Miss Irene Edwards, herself a pupil of Solomon. She suggested that I should audition with Solomon who said "you could either be a good pianist or a good surgeon but not both" so I chose my career in medicine.

My idea had been to finish Medicine first (in case I wanted a profession to fall back on-as my father, a Surgeon, kept reminding me that though there were lots of successful pianists, there were far more unsuccessful but still excellent pianists barely making a living.

**FC** When you were a piano student, did you yourself have any problems?

**EO** As a student pianist I had tight tendons in both forearms, and heavy big hand bones, but a sensitive teacher who noted my dislike for arpeggios and practising scales, cut out Czerny and put in Schubert when necessary. Posture, and Ergonomics and 'STRESS' had not been 'invented' then!

**FC** What were your lessons from Solomon like?

**EO** The only lessons I had with Solomon himself, one on one, were when he was in Sydney and came to my home several times.

To me he seemed a real Gentleman. When teaching he was very strict about interpreting the music. If you played Chopin, you had to become CHOPIN. He sat at the piano and showed me the difference between playing Chopin and BEING Chopin!

We corresponded for years after he came back

to London and I tried to keep the piano lessons and practice going as I progressed at University and Hospital.

When I came to London to continue my medical studies, Solomon had become ill after two strokes, and I was taking more time researching how to operate on tiny premature babies who had severe birth defects. It was agreed that Microsurgery was important enough to keep developing it, so my music making became second string.

I developed the operating microscope and the instruments and tiny operative procedures using my pianist's dexterity to manipulate these new miniature implements under intense magnification.

After eight years in London, most at Great Ormond Street Hospital for Sick Children (during this exciting time I met and became friends with many musicians including the Ashkenazys). I was offered Professorships in the USA, in Britain, and I was also offered a Senior Lectureship in Sydney, which suited my wife who desperately wanted to go home to Australia, now she had three new degrees and two new small children.

Soon after returning to Sydney I carried out the first reattachment of an amputated index finger of a two year old child using Microsurgery, and Microsurgery took over my life. More and more people were referred with conditions that could only be operated upon with advanced Microtechniques and fine equipment.

**FC** How did you come to be involved in Musician's Clinics?

**EO** Being a Microsurgeon, Hand Surgeon, and an ex performing musician, I soon built up 'my hobby' of looking after performing

instrumentalists, who were referred from all over Australia.

In the early 1970's I spent time collaborating with Sydney and Melbourne's musically orientated doctors. We set up the *Australian Performing Artists Medical Society* (PAMS) and wrote my first scientific articles on 'Music Induced Injuries'.

Every Orchestra in the mid and late seventies and eighties that visited Australia allowed us in PAMS to do a survey of their medical problems.

Dr Hunter Fry and myself published results showing that over 50% of all these hundreds of performers in dozens of Orchestras were 'carrying' injuries, and that in fact any orchestra was a group of 'survivors' of many conditions caused by their very profession of playing music on well made, but unsuitable instruments.

And as for TENSION in performance, we soon began to realise from the surveys that very many musicians were taking beta blockers for their tension relief.

Prior to that only the acutely observing intelligent teachers, such as Carola Grindea, were on the lookout to diagnose and treat sensibly the *Tensions in Performance*.

The books and articles being written in the early days pointed things out and attempted explanations and suggested treatments, but mostly were just acute experience and sensible guesswork.

Nowadays there are sensitive Medical and Radiological equipment to show the human brain in action in 3D and colour, means of measuring accurately the speed of nerve impulses and muscle responses and so, even Focal Dystonia can be studied accurately, thus methods of treatment can be more scientifically planned.

I also started giving courses to help Music Teachers at the Sydney Conservatorium and at Universities learn about the care and attention needed by their pupils as they grow up to be Musicians.

**FC** Can you tell me about a memorable patient at the musician's clinic?

**EO** I cannot tell if it was my very first patient musician. It was a late teenage girl violinist who arrived with her mother. She had a shoulder and posture problem which gave her considerable pain. As her mother was present,

I asked her to take off her blouse, sit on the chair and take up her violin in the playing position with bow on strings. She had the worst Ulnar sided stress position, a twisted neck with head bent over to the RIGHT shoulder due to too big a rest, and scoliosis of the twisted back. It was only after I corrected all of these, took away the rest, adjusted her posture and undid her cramped wrist and fingers, had her play in a relaxed way, and saw her big smile. When I told her what I thought of her *terrible teacher*, the smile became even bigger and she said that the teacher was... her Mother! Actually, she started as a child on her mother's violin, which was too big by far!

**FC** You have been a passionate advocate of preventing musician's injuries.

**EO** As a Hand Surgeon I was involved in early cases of what was initially

called 'Repetitive Strain Injuries' (RSI). I researched this, and took part in an important Legal Case where most of the doctors opposed there being such a condition, and declared that it was due mostly to the patient's imagination. I provided evidence of the strains involved in heavy work and also in the overuse of small muscles, and we could win genuine cases of Muscular Overuse.

In a later case I was able to represent all the musicians in our Official State Orchestras, and offer enough evidence to convince the Judge that all our musicians had to have parking facilities right next to the Halls they played in. It was unreasonable to expect them to carry their heavy instruments and heavy music sheets and books, long distances, which strained their forearm muscles, their hands and shoulders, and then expect them to play delicately some beautiful music.

FC I understand that your passion for prevention also extends to designing chairs for musicians and I believe you also designed the chairs in Sydney Opera House?

EO I designed an Operating Chair for Surgeons to be able to sit down to be steady for fine work, particularly while using tiny equipment in microsurgery, in the small diameter of intense light. That chair was well researched and then I discovered just how ILL- designed musicians' chairs were. I did a survey of the chairs used in Music Schools and found that few had any up/down provision even for child pianists. Another survey then found how poor the chairs provided for orchestras were as they gave no support where needed and gave little flexibility. So I designed more anatomically based dynamic chairs for both musicians and surgeons.

FC When you took part in the ISSTIP Course at Trinity College in 2003 you made us realise that adequate blood supply to our muscles was the important factor in preventing injuries.

You insisted that 'warm-up' and 'warm-down' exercises should be regularly practised before and at the end of practice or performance sessions. You advised a brisk walk up to the Royal Observatory to get the heart pumping the blood round so that we should never play with cold hands or even elbows.

EO Yes You are right . . . what I said two years ago is so true. 'It is all in the blood supply to the tissues doing the work'.

The first 'Owen Warm Up Rules for Musicians' were devised in 1976. Athletes use big muscles with a big blood supply and yet warm up and warm down Musicians are intensively using small muscles with a more precarious blood supply for many more hours than an athlete would.

FC What have you been doing since you were last in London?

EO I have retired from routine microsurgery operations, as I can leave these to my team of excellent microsurgeons and staff, but still run

a research programme, give lectures and run demonstrations about surgery such as the annual Microsurgery Training Workshops in France and in 50 other countries.

As for prevention of musicians' problems, to this day, despite our efforts to educate teachers and musicians themselves, there still is not enough done by the medical profession in general, although a few specialists are concerned with the many problems and injuries among musicians and other performers. As to the music teachers I try to reach as many as possible, and continue to lecture about this tremendously important subject – musician's problems.

I still look after the state Orchestral musicians and teach music students to look after their PPPs, IIIs, MMMs and AAAs.

If they watch their P I M E's ( Proper Instrumental Musical Exercises) they can confidently look forward to a long and happy career, giving pleasure and wondrous musical experiences to their audience and to themselves, without causing themselves 'Mayhem'!

FC Thank you for giving up some time from your busy schedule to talk to us and we very much look forward to enjoying learning about how your three P's, I's, M's and E's will keep us away from your three M's.

#### Notes:

PPP - 'Principles of Proper Positions' / 'Prudent Personal practising'

III - 'Ideal Instrumental Interaction'

MMM vs MMM - 'Musical Muscle Movement versus Meddlesome Mechanical Medicine'

AAA - 'Approaches to Awful Auditions'

Professor Owen presented a session working with musicians with various dysfunctions, including Focal Dystonia, at the first INSTITUTE SEMINAR at Thames Valley University, Faculty of Arts, on Sunday 2nd October.

## Music in Mind and Brain

Dr D. S. Lasserson

Research Fellow  
Department of Stroke Medicine  
King's College Hospital

*What do musicians do to create a performance? What processes are going on inside their minds? Aside from considerations of technique and control over hands, arms and vocal cords, the nature of brain activity that underlies musical understanding and musical creation is often neglected. This is a great shame as we have much to learn about ourselves as musicians and philosophers from such an inquiry.*

Insights into the musical brain come from many forms of observation. Whether it is a comparison of aural testing of the 'tone deaf' versus music students, or examining the work of a great composer after brain injury we can learn how the mind breaks down musical information and potentially where this is occurring in the brain itself.

The title of this article draws a distinction between mind and brain. We are in good company by doing this, going back to Descartes and beyond, and it is also pragmatic for this discussion. The concept of the mind is one of processes, where a wealth of incoming information is packaged into manageable units and used creatively. We can infer what processes make up the musical mind by studying responses to musical tasks. The concept of the brain is physical, it is a richly interconnected network of electrically active cells where certain groups of cells have a particular function. It is perhaps easier to understand this after brain injury where we can observe a loss of a patient's musical ability.

Before we can delve into musical neuroscience, we must first understand how sound, the building block of music, is handled by the brain.

Sound is a physical property of air, in fact it is a local variation in air pressure. It has pitch, it has intensity, it has a location (where we think the sound came from) and for all musical instruments, particularly the larynx, it has a great complexity. This complexity is made up of many many pure tones bundled together creating the timbre. The ear's design helps in locating the origin of sounds and the nervous tissue that picks up the sound can break it down into its constituent pure tones, which are then fed through the brainstem and into the temporal lobe of the brain on the opposite side.

To add another layer of complexity, our awareness of sounds can change. We can attend to certain areas of space more than others resulting in improved sound detection from those areas. Also we can attend to a melodic line played by an instrument by 'picking it out' from many instruments playing at once. These are processes that use 'selective attention' and in fact show the influence our mind has on what we perceive as the outside reality.

Our plan of investigation is to first examine the evidence for the forms of musical processing in the mind and relating these to people who are unable, scientifically, to hear music, although they can hear sounds. This also challenges our

notions of links between speech and music. We will then examine how musicians and composers suffer after brain injury.

The first set of experiments for discussion test the theory that music is best processed by one half of the brain. The distinction between 'right brain' and 'left brain' has filtered into popular science writings and is best summarised by artistic and creative ability alongside making gestalt or 'whole' perceptions (right) versus mathematical, logical and lexical ability (left) *although this separation is slightly artificial*. This lateralisation of functions is most often seen in right-handed people.

Gordon (J Exp Psychol (1980) 6:516-520) compared music teachers with professional musicians on a chord discrimination task. They were interested in whether there was a difference in discrimination ability between the right and left ear. In other words if sounds were fed only via headphones to the left ear (and then onto the right side of the brain) were the subjects better at chord discrimination than if the sounds were fed to the right ear (and so left brain)?

*They found that music teachers scored higher if the left ear heard the sounds whereas professional musicians showed no ear preference. This may suggest that professional musicians have a more even spread of musical processing involving both sides of the brain.*

Gaede (Neuropsychologia (1978) 16:369-373) presented musicians and non-musicians with two tasks – to identify how many notes were in a chord, and to identify the difference between two similar melodies. Those with low musical ability showed left ear dominance for the chord task and right ear dominance for the melody task. Musicians were equally able to perform the tasks using either ear.

Although these experiments are simple they suggest, in keeping with the right brain/left

brain distinction that appreciating a 'whole' sound is best carried out by the right brain (from the left ear!), and analysing a succession of notes in a melody (as we would a word or string of numbers) is best carried out by the left brain. Nevertheless, professional musicians do not show these lateralised preferences.

A direct test of this hypothesis was reported by Borchgrevnik (Music, Language, Speech and Brain ed Sundberg 1991) where patients about to undergo neurosurgery for epilepsy had either the right or left brain selectively anaesthetised. When the right hemisphere was not functioning patients lost the ability to control pitch when singing but their appreciation and production of rhythm was preserved.

The most exciting investigation of the musical mind is based on changes in blood flow within the brain. When certain areas of the brain are being used, they need a greater blood flow. This increased blood flow can be measured with the use of radioactive tracers and changes in relation to music tasks can be measured. This can lead to the identification of music centres within the brain.

Platel (Brain (1997), 120, 229-243) studied the brain blood flow patterns of non-musical subjects. They were played similar melodies over and over again, but were told to focus on different aspects of the melody at different points in the experiment, such as changes in pitch intervals, rhythm and timbre.

Changes in timbre activated the right frontal lobe. Assessing the quality of a complex sound requires a gestalt perception i.e. hearing the sound in its entirety, rather than analysing a series of sounds. This finding is in keeping with the sound presentation studies arguing for lateralisation of different music functions in the non-musical brain.

Changes in rhythm activated the left frontal lobe, in fact including the area usually associated with the muscle control of speech. If one thinks of both speech and music as requiring sequential processing of auditory information then this finding is not at all surprising.

In a similar study by Zatorre (Science (1992) 256:846-9) a pitch discrimination task involving comparing melodic contours, activated the right hemisphere. This certainly agrees with the finding of loss of pitch control after selective right hemisphere anaesthesia.

So far we can conclude that in non-musicians musical sounds are subject to different forms of processing that are most likely taking place in different parts of the brain. These are integrated to give us the conscious experience of hearing music. Professional musicians may be able to use a more evenly distributed network to process music, and this may be what determines musical talent.

The condition of 'amusia' throws more light on our inquiry. It is defined as a musical disability that is not explained by hearing loss or cognitive problems. People with this condition hear sounds but they can't hear music. It was first reported over a hundred years ago by Grant-Allen (Mind 1878;10:157-67), but has only recently been the subject of scientific study.

Peretz reported a case history (Neuron (2002), 33, 185- 191) of a 50 year old woman who had always hated music as to her it sounded just like noise. She was tested on her ability to notice changes in a repeated melody, which either had the melodic contour altered by changing the pitch of one note or the contour was preserved but the whole melody was shifted in pitch. She was unable to perceive any changes at all.

Further testing revealed that she could just detect a rising pitch change of three semitones but she could not detect a descending pitch change of up to an octave. This contrasts sharply with normal non-musicians who can detect quarter tone changes that are either descending or ascending.

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**A lot of meaning in speech is conveyed by changes in intonation, which represents pitch changes of spoken words.**

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People with amusia usually do not have problems with communication and *prima facie* this may be thought to be due to the larger pitch changes in speech compared to most melodies.

---

A larger study of eleven adults with amusia further clarified their deficits as being specific to music. Ayotte (Brain (2002), 125, 238-251) compared the amusicals with non-musical normal people as a control group on a range of pitch tasks. Crucially they were tested on whether they could perceive pitch change in a range of pre-recorded sentences and the amusicals performed as well as the control group. Then the sentences had the words removed by a computer but the pitch change contour of the sentence was preserved. With all the linguistic information removed the amusical group were now unable to detect change in pitch, even though it had exactly the same 'melodic contour' as the sentence whose pitch change they had just perceived

Brain injury can affect musical ability and leave speech relatively unscathed. Peretz also reported a case she studied ten years after brain surgery on the temporal lobes and the right frontal lobe (Can J Exp Psychol. (1997) 51(4):354-68). The patient could no longer recognise melodies or discriminate between different melodies, but could perform normally on language tasks.

These results have tremendous implications for how we see the connection between music and language. They may in fact have separate pitch perception systems which would explain how amusicals can understand intonation in speech. If that is the case then when we sing words are we using our 'music' system or our 'language' system? What do talented singers use and do they have different neurological connections between speech and music networks?

*The commonest cause of adult onset neurological disability is stroke, and amusia may well occur commonly afterwards. Schuppert (Brain (2000), 123, 546-559) studied twenty patients after their first stroke in hospital on a range of musical tasks assessing pitch perception, interval discrimination, rhythm and melodic contour assessment and metre.*

Patients with right hemisphere lesions as a group were more impaired on metre tasks than pitch tasks but 65% of them showed deficits on all assessments. Patients with left sided lesions were impaired on all but the pitch tasks and as a group 75% of them showed musical disability.

These findings are complex and may reflect the effects of an acute stroke on ability to concentrate or understand the tasks involved. Nevertheless rather than using this study to answer questions of how lateralised musical processing can be, it is more important to conclude that there is a hitherto unrecognised disability of post-stroke music perception and therefore enjoyment. This demands attention as for some people it could significantly further reduce their quality of life.

Finally we should consider the case of how a musician's music is affected by neurological illness. The first set of studies discussed above suggest that a musician's brain is different in some way. The only direct attempt to prove this was when Chiyo Tuge (1908-1969), the Japanese pianist, had her brain dissected after her premature death by her neuroanatomist husband, Hideomi Tuge, in a rather unusual labour of love. He described a larger than normal inferior frontal gyrus, which is involved in the control of hand movements, as well as a generally more convoluted cortical surface, although the significance of this latter finding is unclear.

Vissarion Shebalin, the composer and Professor of music at the Moscow Conservatoire suffered his second stroke at the age of 57. He had a large left hemisphere haemorrhage resulting in a profound aphasia leaving him unable to speak or understand spoken words and he was studied by Luria, the great Russian neuroscientist.

However he still managed to compose a further fourteen chorales, two sonatas, eleven songs and one symphony as well as teaching for four years before he eventually died. Shostakovich, among his other peers Khatchaturian and Prokofiev, found no difference between pre and post stroke compositions.

His musical creativity was preserved even though he had no language ability, further demonstrating separateness of music and language, and how if disease prevents expression in one modality it can still find a route out of the mind in another.

Other causes of neurological disease result in a more gradual loss of ability and these degenerative conditions include dementia. In some cases this can start relatively early in life. Maurice Ravel, aged 58, began to notice language problems and this was documented by his physician, Dr Theophile Alajouanine. He could understand language but had great problems with expression and this was mirrored in the change of his musical ability. Although he could recognise his own compositions and detect errors in them he became unable to sight read, dictate or name notes.

It is now agreed that Ravel suffered from fronto-temporal dementia, which has a fairly circumscribed range of presentations although most descriptions focus on language or behavioural disturbance. Furthermore the frontal and temporal lobes can be diffusely involved becoming atrophic or shrunken and as such this will not help to model accurately locations with musical functions. It is interesting to note that only when a musician develops a dementia do neurologists become aware of musical cognition being affected by that disease process.

Music has unique neural circuitry within the brain. It can be selectively damaged, depending on the disease process, and deny the patient musical expression, understanding and enjoyment. In the case of musicians this can be their greatest tragedy.

*"C'était beau, tout de même. Et puis, j'avais encore tant de*

*musique dans la tête. Maintenant, c'est fini pour moi".*

"It was beautiful, anyway. And I still had so much music in my head. Now, it is all finished for me."

Maurice Ravel.

## General Advice to Musicians

**Christopher B. Wynn Parry, M.B.E., M.A., D.M., F.R.C.P., F.R.C.S.**  
Neurolog/Rheumatologist, Consultant Adviser at ISSTIP and BPAMT Clinics;  
Co-author with Ian Winspur, F.R.C.S., F.A.C.S., of the highly acclaimed book  
*"The Musician's Hand" - a Clinical Guide*  
(Martin Dunitz)

### Responsibilities of Performing Musicians

1. Importance of General Fitness
2. Importance of Good Posture
3. Good, well balanced diet
4. Need to work on Relaxation
5. Importance of 'warming up' and 'cooling down'
6. Sensible practice technique, not more than 20-30 minutes at a time. STOP and stretch for five minutes, have a drink
7. Need to have some "body control" techniques so that musicians can control the body in times of stress and not let it control them!
8. Need for recreation/holidays
9. Need to develop broader culture

### Responsibilities of Teachers

1. Correct choice of instrument for musician's body build and temperament
2. Correct technique from early stages
3. Inculcate sensible practice and study of technique
4. Early referral to Doctor /Therapist in case of trouble

**Playing should never be painful if technique is sound, body fit and spirit calm!**

# "Don't worry, be happy". Peak experience in musical performance

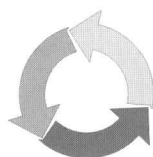
Nancy Lee Harper

*The lights dim. The curtain rises. The Artist walks onstage, bows to the audience, turns to the piano, and after a moment of silence begins to play. The music journey commences. Melodious sounds weave their way through the hall like a beautiful perfume. A spell is cast.*

*"...the music starts to speak for itself...that moment of bliss when artist and music become one and you feel the audience sharing in this unity...there is complete hush...everyone is listening intently, totally at peace..."<sup>1</sup>*

*This is the Zone. This is Bliss.*

## THE ZONE



Peak Experience

Peak Performance

Flow

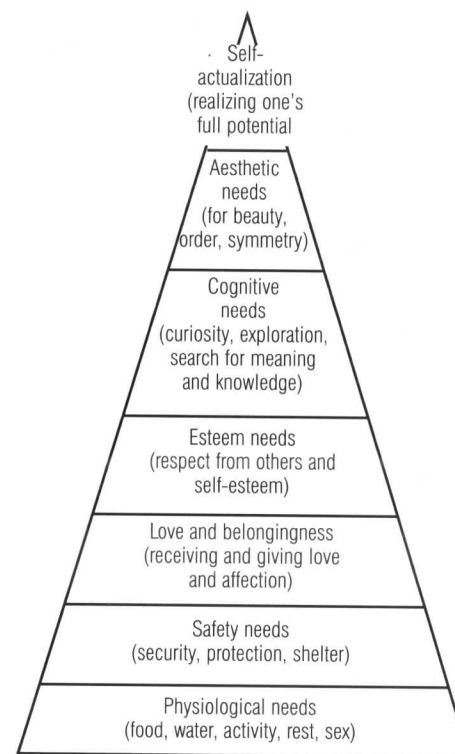
The Zone has been studied by psychologists for many years, particularly as it related to the sports arena. Peak Experience is known as "intense joy while performing an activity with success".<sup>2</sup> It is often found in conjunction with Peak Performance (superior functioning) and Flow (fun).

Peak Experience is an expression of the human

need for Self-actualisation or self-realisation of one's human potential.<sup>3</sup> It is the **supreme goal**, after having attained the fulfilment of the respective baser states, such as physiological, safety, love and belonging, esteem, cognitive, and aesthetic needs. (See figure next page).

*...we have all experienced times when, instead of being buffeted by anonymous forces, we do feel in control of our actions, masters of our own fate. On the rare occasions that it happens, we feel a sense of exhilaration, a deep sense of enjoyment that is long cherished and that becomes a landmark in memory for what life should be like.<sup>5</sup>*

Yet one of the basic problems in attaining to the Peak Experience in Piano Performance, or in any performance, is the quest for **Perfection**. The need for accuracy and fear of failure often obliterate any chance the performer has to achieve the Peak Experience.



## Maslow's Hierarchy of Human Needs<sup>4</sup>

Demystifying the idea that Peak Experience can only occur with a 'perfect' performance, the young 11-year old violinist, Joshua Bell, describes his first encounter with The Zone while playing during a competition:

It [the 1st movement of Lalo's *Symphonie Espagnole*] begins with this difficult opening way up on the E string. I slipped off the fingerboard and botched the entire thing. I was angry with myself for ruining it so soon. I said, "I want to start over so I can get through it," and something clicked after the first line. I remember feeling as though I could do no wrong. It was the first time I had been in the zone, and whatever I thought I could do, I did. I felt technically confident. I wasn't looking to get into the zone, you understand, and I remember it being such an incredible feeling. From that point on I just let the music take me there.

It was a visualisation thing: I could "see" the zone happening, and then I could make it happen for me<sup>6</sup>

Value systems also play an important role in determining the possibility of occurrence of the Peak Experience. For example, a child who is given a piano piece to perform that is not above his capability may very well be able to experience Peak Experience and in doing so give a superior performance, a Peak Performance. As social expectations rise, the occurrence of the Peak Experience may decrease. These experiences are relative to the individual's personality, cultivation of abilities, and most importantly the **openness and predisposition of the individual to respond**. What may constitute a **Peak Experience for one person may be a common occurrence for another**.

*It may not be the environment that determines whether a powerful experience occurs; it may involve far more the openness and predisposition of the individual to respond. What may be perceived by others to be a common-place occurrence, becomes for the individual a peak experience...<sup>7</sup>*

From my own experience I know that the Peak Experience can occur not only in Piano Performance, but also as an audience listener or even during the practice session, an activity that is normally diametrically opposed to the Peak Experience by virtue of its repetitive nature.

## HAPPINESS

### ("Don't Worry; Be Happy!")

The question arises: If Peak Experience brings happiness or 'intense joy' while performing an activity with success, can it be cultivated? The answer seems to be 'yes'. Studying the aspect of happiness, M. Csikszentmihalyi observes that:

- (1) Happiness is not something that happens randomly or is the result of good fortune;
- (2) Happiness cannot be bought or commanded;
- (3) Happiness does not depend on external events;

- (3) Happiness does not depend on external events.
- (4) Happiness depends on **our internal interpretations of external events.** Happiness is **"a condition that must be prepared for, cultivated, and defended privately by each person.** People who learn to control inner experience will be able to determine the quality of their lives, which is as close as any of us can come to being happy."<sup>8</sup>

It appears that being in touch with our higher selves leads to intense joy and great happiness. The higher state (some refer to it as higher awareness, higher consciousness), while manifesting physical characteristics attributed partially to the brain's Supralimbic system, brings not only joy but fulfilment. It can be

taught. It can be learned. As one therapist affirmed, **"There is no elevator for happiness; we have to climb the stairs."**<sup>9</sup>

## A SPORTS MODEL APPLIED TO PIANO PERFORMANCE

The stairs to be climbed for attaining Happiness, Intense Joy, or Peak Experience are several. The first rule in the attainment of the Peak Experience is that there are no rules. The attainment of the Peak Experience is purely a **subjective matter.** What works for one person may not necessarily work for another. While an **individual approach** is valid, the same questions may be asked by everyone.

Studying a Sports Model for application to Piano Performance, several steps must be mastered<sup>10</sup>

### 6. Control of Inner Experience

### 5. Movement toward Success

### 4. Skill Development

### 3. Perception

### 2. Cultivation

### 1. Preparation

## Preparing for Peak Experience

Requisite (What)	Technique (How)	Occurrence (When)
1. Preparation	"Know thyself	Prior to the performance
2. Cultivation	"Deliberate practise" Directed practise	Prior to the Performance
3. Perception	Attitudes (attitude-perception- feeling-performance)	Prior to, during, after the Performance
4. Skill Development	Readying Approach: -observe your thoughts -control those factors (internal/external)	Prior to, during, after the Performance
5. Movement toward Success	"Success is peace of mind which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you did your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming" <sup>11</sup>	Prior to, during, after the Performance
6. Control of the inner experience	Concentration	Prior to, during, after the Performance

## 1. PREPARATION

### "Know Thyself"

The most important step of all to any plan is the Foundation. Thus, Preparation, which involves the first four steps, is essential. The first step - Preparation - involves knowing oneself without denial. This includes one's cycles, one's learning modes and preferences so that a healthy climate is created in which to succeed. Sometimes teachers and students are mis-matched. To study different approaches to learning (Ayurvedic Medicine, Carl Jung, Bernice McCarthy's 4-Mat System, theories of Keith Golay and David Keirsey) may shed light on what we already know about ourselves. Are we Thinkers, Feelers, Doers, or Intuitive learners? Do we easily learn contemporary music but have difficulty in playing a Bach Fugue? Do we easily expound a Classical sonata but are not easily able to express Romantic *rubati*?

## 2. CULTIVATION -

### "Deliberate Practice"

After the soil has been prepared, it must then be cultivated. For musicians, this means practice, practice, practice. But does Practice make Perfect or does Practice make Permanent? The latter is the correct answer, according to the latest research.<sup>12</sup>

Experts agree that all practise should be "deliberate" or goal-oriented in order to be effective in the long-run. Content and quality of practice is also important. For day-dreamers, this comes as something of a rude awakening, but keeping a practise journal may be helpful. In it, **Clear Task Definition** is a must (assignment sheets, realistic goals, etc.). **Informative Feedback** is one of the key tools in achieving Peak Experience, because with this process we can go beyond mere analysis of the problems. Video-taping and recording practice sessions are important, as are review of teachers', coaches', or colleagues' comments. Also very important is our own perception of how we think and feel about our own performance (step n° 4), as well as our own motivational needs. Answers will be found in either or both intrinsic or extrinsic rewards. **Opportunities for repetition and correction of errors** for professional musicians are necessary for the extra measure of Perfection and control that lead to Peak Experience.

Playing in informal recitals, for family and friends, in Masterclasses, social venues, and any place that allows us to comfortably perform new repertoire is very valuable. For added security, it is helpful to put away the repertoire once it is learned and performed informally for a while and then to re-try it in safe places after it has matured.

**Should we always practise slowly?** In my own experience, some passages simply do not work slowly and indeed are a hindrance if learned that way. Brain research confirms this idea.

Another unsolved problem is the neuronal basis of the transition from guided slow movements, which are performed under steady sensory control, to fast, ballistic movements, which have to be performed with-out on-line sensory feedback. It is assumed that different brain regions produce these two types of movements and that the transition from one type to the other may be incomplete. This might explain why practising guided movements while slowly and systematically increasing the tempo may finally hamper the execution of this movement at a very fast tempo....we would recommend, even at an early stage, rehearsing small segments of the movement pattern at a fast tempo. However, at the same time, the precise automation of difficult movements has to be practised in a precisely guided slow tempo.<sup>13</sup>

Ignacy Jan Paderewski was a model for practise. Having come to the piano at a late age, he made up for lost time. His well-known quip - "If I don't practise for one day, I know it; if I don't practise for two days, the critics know it; if I don't practise for three days, the audience knows it" - should be heeded as much as another practice model he employed:

A Paderewski recital began with his piano practice immediately after his previous recital. Harold Bauer is on record for saying that Paderewski and Busoni were the only pianists he knew who practised after a concert.<sup>14</sup>

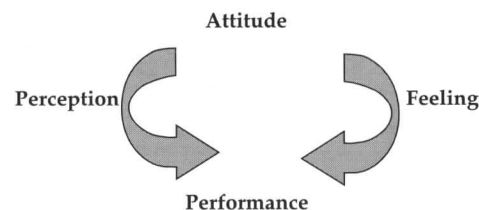
How important it is to take advantage of the heightened state after a concert to review and prepare for the next one!

### 3. PERCEPTION - "Attitudes"

Perception, or awareness, is an ongoing, simultaneous state (conscious or unconscious) of observation-analysis-feedback-adjustment (correction). Perception is going on all the time, whether or not we are aware of it. It can be found in many situations and may apply to not only the teacher but the pupil or performer, whether in a lesson or on stage. Questions like: "How are we feeling when we are performing in front of a small audience, a large audience, for friends, etc.?" "How are we reacting to audience noises, bad lighting, unexpected occurrences, memory slips, illness just before an important performance, etc.?" "What causes us comfort in performance?" "What causes us discomfort?" Self-reflection, as well as the teacher's or coach's astute observations, can be of invaluable assistance.

#### Attitude-Perception-Feeling-Performance

In Performance, the combination of Attitude-Perception-Feeling is operating all of the time, even if we are not aware of it.<sup>15</sup>



The subconscious thoughts "I might have a memory slip" or "What if I make a mistake in performance?" are often present and underlying our daily behaviour. Emotional states and mental attitudes are learned and taught even in our practise sessions.<sup>16</sup> The Inner Game concepts of Trust-Will-Commitment can further enhance our Perceptions.

### 4. SKILL DEVELOPMENT "The Ready Approach"

In the Sports model, control of emotions, or the state of mind, is as important as physical well-

being. In this step - the Ready Approach - two aspects are taken into account: 1) **observation of one's thoughts** and 2) **control of them**. For example, "How does what I think affect my playing?"

Thoughts occupy space and time. Thoughts can be measured. Thoughts are energy. Thoughts are real.

Switching from the conscious (thoughts) to the subconscious roles of the brain is an important function in attaining Peak Experience. In Performance, **Paralysis through analysis** may occur if we do not let go and simply trust our intuition, switching automatically from the analytical left hemisphere to the creative right hemisphere of the brain.

Thinking and Feeling cannot exist at the same time. Dr. Marcel Just of Carnegie Mellon University, as well as other have proven the inefficacy of performing two tasks simultaneously.

the brain [has] only a finite amount of space for tasks requiring attention. When people try to do two tasks at the same time (like concentration on the music and attending to other concerns simultaneously), brain activity does not double, it decreases. The result is that the two tasks are performed simultaneously less well than one task alone. The brain becomes less efficient when it performs more than one complex task at a time.<sup>17</sup>

One professional musician, harpist Yolanda Kondonassis, describes the Zone for her.

For me, that fearless state is defined by a sense that there is not even the slightest possibility of failure, as if slipping or missing isn't part of my reality. When I don't get into the zone, it's usually because I haven't prepared my body properly. In my experience, the whole process of achieving that perfect flow starts with the basics: rest, the right food, and exercise. My mind needs to feel sharp and flexible since playing the harp requires keeping track of many elements at once.

The optimal state for me is one in which I can switch comfortably between an automatic, or muscle memory, mode and a very focused, conscious mode. I need to be

at this master panel and flip the switch back and forth as need dictates. When technicalities don't require my direct awareness, I prefer to lose myself in the music; that's when it's good to get into the automatic mode. Muscle memory can be a powerful tool as long as it's backed up by a strong conscious awareness in preparation. That's why a controlled blend of the conscious and automatic is so important.

Briefly, scientific results suggest that musical expertise influences auditory brain activation patterns and that change in these activation patterns depend on the teaching-learning strategies applied. We need to understand the extremes at play in practise and in performance:

Practice	Performance
1. Think	Feel
2. Left Hemisphere dominant	Right Hemisphere dominant
3. Analysis	Expression
4. Repetition	Uniqueness
5. Beta Brain Waves	Very active Beta Waves that should be transformed into calmer Alpha Brain Waves

A **controlled blend of the conscious and automatic** is an important key to attaining the Peak Experience.

### 5. MOVEMENT TOWARD SUCCESS

Just as control of thoughts is essential in Performance, just as necessary is the **control of emotions**. For most people, this is a much more difficult step than control of thoughts. Fear of failure, fear of success, fear of humiliation, or other fears may be the root cause of his social phobia. In some people the fear can be so great as to cause panic or incapacity to perform well. The bodily systems are put into a survival-alert status through the sympathetic nervous system. Some of the causes may be found from:

- 1) overestimating the probability of a feared event;
- 2) overestimating the severity of a feared event;
- 3) underestimating coping resources (what you can do about it);
- 4) underestimating rescue factors (what other people can do to help you).<sup>18</sup>

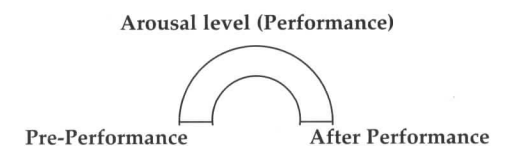
Most performers engage in "self-talk" (the "inner judges", as Eloise Ristad<sup>19</sup> called them). Negative statements like, "What if I have a memory slip?" or "What if I can't control my trembling fingers?" reflect the dangerous possibility of a catastrophe. Being able to recognise what type of anxiety the performer experiences - **cognitive** (mental) or **somatic** (bodily) may help in developing strategies for overcoming the situation.

Realistic self-appraisal is the healthiest coping (cognitive) strategy. Positive statements like "No one is perfect. If I make a few mistakes, that is ok because I really try to communicate the music" or "My audience loves me and wants to hear what I have to say".

From pianist Garrick Ohlsson, these words about **defensive optimism** give an inner glimpse into his approach.

I guess you could call it taking more of a positive mental attitude than sheer courage, bravado, or competitiveness. Even when I'm walking on the stage to play, I try to think courageous thoughts. I think only of smiling at the audience. What kind of feeling is it? I call it defensive optimism.<sup>20</sup>

Often we consider stage fright to be a negative emotion. However, it can also be used positively, like any emotion. Knowing one's arousal level and how to control it is important. Studies have shown that the best arousal level is a mid-range or inverted U. This is a state in which the performer is able to channel and control the "nervous" or arousal energy for the maximum, not minimum, effect.<sup>21</sup>



## 6. CONTROL OF THE INNER EXPERIENCE

### Count-down to Performance:

Know what you need to do to become ready for the Performance. What is your plan 1 month, 1 week, 1 day, 1 hour, 1 minute before the Performance? Some suggestions are:

#### Count-down to Performance

#### Readying Plan

1 month before	Mental rehearsal, prepare clothes, prepare materials, etc.
1 week	Prepare clothes, prepare hall by making sure that the piano is tuned, the lighting is good, a page-turner is found if needed, etc.
1 day	Check above, prepare anything else needed such as food and nutrition requirements during the performance
1 hour	Warm-up, mental rehearsal, if preferred
1 minute	Grindea technique <sup>22</sup> or other, give love & trust

### Know Your Own Cycles

The mind-body connection lends itself to ongoing exploration. Whether the pianist chooses self-hypnosis, aphorisms, visualisation, special techniques, yoga, Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais 'Awareness through Movement' exercises or other is an individual matter. What is important is to 'Know your own Cycles' - to know what leads to success in performance. Overall, these Cycles can be categorised in three levels:<sup>23</sup>

- (1) **Physical** - energy-relaxation. Know what you need to be successful during a performance.

Know what gives you energy, what takes your energy, what you need to do to feel in control, what you need to relax. Avoid citrus, as the acidity may upset your stomach. Grape juice gives a quick surge of energy, relieves nervous exhaustion, and clears phlegm.<sup>24</sup> Vitamin B complex and magnesium help with physical exhaustion, as zinc helps with mental exhaustion. Know how your body reacts to sugar, caffeine, chocolate, etc. Some pianists need to arrive two hours early; others prefer to arrive only 5 minutes before the concert.

- (2) **Cognitive** or Mental - no last minute learning. Know how you learn and how you retain what you learn. Do you need to play the program several times before you feel secure with it? Or do you have the ability to learn quickly and forget quickly, often giving the best performance the first time but never again reaching this level of concentration?
- (3) **Emotional** - considered by some to be the most important. Know your feelings and what causes them? Do you over-react to the authority figure in the audience? Can just one visitor in the green room before the concert 'un-nerve' your control or do you need a close friend to be with you? What happens if you don't get a good night's sleep before hand? What happens if you forget to bring your music to the concert? What happens if the concert is 30 minutes late in starting? How do you feel once you are on stage? How do you feel 10 minutes after you begin the performance? How do you feel at the interval? How do you feel during the second part of the programme?

### Visualisation, Creative Imagery, and Mental Practise

According to Carola Grindea, there are **three performances** that we give: 1) **in the studio** ('I played it perfectly at home'); 2) **on stage** (the real one); and 3) **the ideal one** (the one that we imagine ourselves giving)<sup>25</sup> "Athletes [and musicians] will not be aware of the need to gain control unless they first identify their own ideal performance state and can contrast that state with the present one." [real performance]<sup>26</sup>

**Creative Imagery** or **Visualisation** involves the senses. While we are imagining ourselves on stage we should also be hearing, seeing, and feeling the music, becoming aware of the audience and their reaction to our music, feeling the heat of the lights, imagining extraneous sounds or distractions, etc. Creative imagery has the power to attract positive energy to us, so it is most important to visualise our ideal performance in great detail. This kind of mental practice can be done on the floor, in a comfortable chair, or even in the swimming pool.

### The Readyng Spot

One type of mental preparation that is quite effective is called the 'Readyng Spot'. It is a technique practised not just once before the performance but with regularity in order to overcome 'stage fright' or 'performance nerves'. It requires about 20 minutes and is used to get into 'a specific frame of mind, on a regular basis'<sup>27</sup> This technique should be practised away from regular places (office, studio) and times of work (during early morning, evening, before bedtime).

#### THE READYNG SPOT<sup>28</sup>

I. Relaxation
II. Positive Imagery
III. Negative Imagery
IV. The Feeling
V. Attention Clearing and Focusing
VI. Planning/Studying

### I. Relaxation Imagery Technique (RIT)

Relaxation Imagery Technique (RIT) can be used in general or just prior to the performance. It focuses on the feelings of the body. It uses mental images ('pictures') rather than thoughts ('words') - a critical point. People who have trouble with imaging can begin with their own personal memories of an event, imagining it in vivid detail - sights, sounds, smells, tastes, touch. All sensory experiences are important, but most especially those that are visual.

1. Get into Readyng Spot (absolute quiet).

2. Find a comfortable position (sit in a chair or lie down so that the body is fully supported - the floor is a good place).
3. Close your eyes - recall a pleasant, relaxing scene as vividly as possible and put all your senses into it.
4. Focus your attention on your bodily sensations.
5. Take a deep breath.
6. Exhale - very important!
7. Repeat steps 3-6 two more times.
8. Repeat key phrases that work for you, such as: 'The hall is filling' 'My hands are warm', 'My mind is clear', 'My body is full of energy', 'I can hear the "buzz" in the hall'; Wait 15-20 seconds in between each phrase that you silently. Stay quiet for a while after doing this exercise.

## II. Positive Imagery (PIT)

This is a technique that is good to use at the end of the Readyng Spot.

1. Get into the Readyng Spot.
2. Find the best Positive Image for you. Use commands that you can believe. Don't be humble. Some affirmations might be: 'I love to perform', 'My audience loves me and I love them', 'I am happy when I perform', 'I am the best'. Remember the thrill of victory. It is important to feel the image.
3. Apply it to your next performance. Fantasise about your dream performance (Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, etc.). Picture your hero (if it is not yourself, then 'see' yourself as your favourite pianist - labels inspire us to perform at higher levels: 'Vladimir Horowitz', 'Artur Rubinstein', 'Marta Argerich', 'Clara Haskill', 'Dinu Lipatti', etc.

## III. Negative Imagery Technique (Creative Worrying - NIT)

Use this technique to clear negative thoughts. Rather than fighting to ignore worries or deny their existence, acknowledge them, welcome them, embrace them, learn from them. They can be a positive force for you.

1. Get into Readyng Spot.
2. Picture yourself not performing as well as possible. Dwell strongly on the negative consequences of playing badly. Feel the consequences.
3. Identify your anxieties. Keep a list of worries (not to be used at bedtime!). Worry intensely, efficiently, and in a concentrated manner. Use only this time to worry. Worry is not permitted at any other time. Learn to start-stop your emotional anxieties.

**A word of caution:** if artificial worrying spills over into other parts of life, then stop using this technique. Use it only to control your anxieties.

#### IV. The Feeling

Identify what 'The Feeling' is for you as a performer. What do you need in order to give a successful performance? A big audience? A small audience? A non-judgmental, loving audience? Good co-musicians? Good acoustics? A good piano? A good memory? A feeling of sharing with others? A big cachet? Plenty of rest? Someone backstage who is encouraging before and after you go on stage?

The Feeling can be a negative one - to feel consumed with fear. Or it can be a positive one - to feel the joy of anticipation of performing the music.

Learn how to produce 'The Feeling' upon command, when you need it through: 1) imagery and 2) the structure of your physical world to maximise the likelihood that you will feel right and play well. Some people carry a good luck charm, others need a friend nearby. Whatever works for you is acceptable.

#### V. Attention Clearing and Focusing (Concentration)

Attention may be defined as 'the process by which each person uses his or her senses to perceive the outside world.'<sup>29</sup> Anything that distracts our attention is an impediment in performance. It may be of our own doing or undermining (**internal**) or come from some outside source (**external**). A technique for Attention clearing and Focusing can be used during the 20-minute exercise or before going on stage:

1. Get into Readyng Spot.

2. Become aware of any feelings of tension.
3. Breathe deeply, concentrating on exhalation. Become calm.
4. Think about the world in general. Think about your spot. Think about your teacher. Think about your best friends who will be at your performance. Think about how the upcoming event will be for you (anticipate as many distracting occurrences as possible and see yourself ignoring them, fully intent on your performance. These may be audience coughing, cell phones ringing, talking, lights going out, church bells chiming, sirens blaring, air conditioning turning off and on, birds chirping, babies crying, etc.).
5. Narrow your focus to the moment you walk out on stage, love your audience, take the first bow, sit at the piano. Hear the first notes of your program.

#### VI. Planning/Studying: Mental Rehearsal

The Readyng Approach is used to gain knowledge about yourself and to make a plan for control during practise and performance. It is therefore important to ask yourself: 'Does Mental Imagery help you to feel more ready and less nervous?' 'Do you also need a physical preparation?' 'How long can I use Mental Imagery before my mind wanders?' 'How much rest do I need between sessions?'

#### Staying in the Zone

**Increasing the duration of one's ability to concentrate is a key to staying longer in the Zone.** As was seen earlier, pre-performance rituals are useful, anything that lulls the left-brain into calm. One sports psychologist, Dr. Don Greene, suggests a ritual that is 'strongly visual, kinaesthetic, or auditory for the purpose of disengaging the left brain.'<sup>30</sup>

*The 1-minute Grindea technique complemented with its preparatory physical exercises is ideal, for both the body and the mind to become calm and liberated. Bio-feedback has shown the efficacy of this technique.'*<sup>31</sup>

'Adversity training' can be helpful - practising with noise or distraction. One professor calls upon his students, day or night, to be able to play an excerpt perfectly at any time, testing their ability to concentrate under pressure.

#### CONCLUSION

To adapt Kenneth Ravizza's words to athletes for musicians:

Like any altered state of consciousness, the peak experience is a difficult phenomenon to study. Yet it has tremendous potential significance for the achievement of optimal performance in sport. We cannot guarantee peak experiences, but their occurrence gives intrinsic satisfaction and acts as a valuable reference point in the achievement of performance goals. [Musicians] need to develop a fuller awareness of their [musical] experiences in order to gain control over the self and the [musical] environment. As [teachers] and researchers, we can help the [musician] develop along a path that permits each to attain his or her fullest capabilities.'<sup>32</sup>

To summarise, cultivation of Peak Experience may be done by:

1. reducing stress in your daily life;
2. admitting that you have stage fright, but know that you can handle it;
3. trusting yourself and your preparation that you have done a good job and that you will give a good performance;
4. focusing on the music and your love of it and the desire to give it to others;
5. using a readyng technique of some sort both in practise (Mental rehearsal) and before going onstage.

Peak Experience is a birthright and part of our natural development or self-actualisation, as Maslow affirms. Controlling performance nerves is indeed an accomplishment of which to be proud. Reflecting upon the wisdom of her teacher, Tobias Matthay, pianist Dame Myra Hess reflected:

"As a student I sometimes felt it was going a little too far to be told, when shivering on the brink, to enjoy myself on the platform, but those words, 'Enjoy yourself, enjoy the music,' have ever stayed in my mind and have, I know, helped many others to face

an audience in a spirit of musical spontaneity.'<sup>33</sup>

In that same spirit, the more down-to-earth words of Carola Grindea should remove all fear: "Enjoy your mistakes".<sup>34</sup> "Don't Worry, Be Happy".

Yet perhaps the most touching reminder that we can attain the intense joy of Peak Experience comes from the Chinese culture. Their symbol of Music is synonymous with their symbol for Joy.



Chinese symbol for Music and for Joy

#### NOTES . . .

- 1 Interview with Martino Tirimo by Carola Grindea, *Piano Journal*, no. 52/18, Feb. 1997, p.13.
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- 8 Csikszentmihalyi, p. 2.
- 9 Nossrat Pesechian, *Positive Pschotherapy*, cited in AEN, Portugal (17 de Maio de 2004) *Carta à Festa de 19 Dias de Grandeza*, Appendix 1.
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## Free your neck to release your potential

Damjana Zupan

*I would like to introduce you to some of the answers I have found after years of trying to cope with stage fright – looking for its causes, consequences and for the techniques which might prevent or at least diminish this. I was concerned to helping musicians who were so often prone to the terrifying symptoms of stress.*

When we play an instrument, or when we sing, our being functions as a whole : body, mind, spirit , while at the same time we have to interact with the instrument in an efficient way.

The way we function – whether we feel relaxed and happy or stressed and depressed – depends on the correlation of our whole being in relation to the instrument. In my research I found that it is important to develop first and foremost an awareness of our body and how we function. Only through such an awareness are we able to control the movements needed to execute all aspects of our playing with ease and freedom of muscular co-ordination. As the awareness of our body progresses our mind and spirit become more focused and positively orientated towards the final goal – which is being able to play or sing with ease and above all, enjoy our performances. We will also become better teachers, capable of taking great care of our pupils' bodies and muscles, thus prevent any such problems or injuries.

In this article I would like to talk about the ROLE OF THE NECK in achieving a correlation between the body, mind and spirit and a healthy inter-relation with the instrument. Our understanding is enhanced by our experiencing this acute awareness of our own body and that is why it is important to study Relaxation Techniques or other methods to develop this awareness.

Among the coping techniques I have studied, I found the *Grindea Technique* of real value. I have been using it regularly and very successfully in my own work when practising and performing , as well as in my approach with my students and when presenting Workshops with teachers and students.

*It is easy to learn and takes only a few minutes to bring our body and mind in a perfect state of balance.*

**Step 1:** Stand at ease, very still, with feet slightly apart and with eyes shut.

Think of your spine and order it to lengthen, to move upwards, towards the sky (do not move, these are only 'mental directives').

You will experience a strange sensation; your head is gently lifted and placed on the last vertebrae (the Atlas), while the neck is free of any tension.

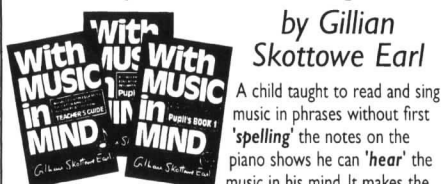
*At this point, there is a perfect alignment of head, neck and back.*

**Step 2:** Exhale slowly , as long as possible, whispering 'haaaaaaa'.

Be aware that the shoulders are lowered, the breath is sent inside your body, acting on the diaphragm ,relaxing it. This area is known as 'solar plexus', where we experience all emotions – fear, joy, excitement, etc.

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*Long exhalations are the antidote to any physiological reaction to anxiety, stress, fear.*

After a long exhalation the body needs to 'breathe in'. Be aware of the back widening.

**Step 3:** Concentrate your attention on the knees and ankles and allow them to be very soft, flexible, to feel like foam. Experience the strange sensation of the body becoming light, as if floating in space. The body is now in a perfect 'state of balance'.

There is *stillness in the body and stillness in the mind* and this is needed at the moment we are on stage, ready to start performing. The mind is not distracted by other thoughts and this is very important if we are to achieve our mastery in performance.

When we reach this relaxed state of balance we should try to maintain it while practising or when performing. We must also know how to remain alert, aware of the music, of our body, of our mind and capable of functioning as a whole.

The awareness of our body is a first step towards recognizing those factors which make our lives uncomfortable and we have to learn to develop a right approach to cope with the dysfunctions created by wrong usage of body and muscles.

Thanks to the successful development of Music Medicine, and, especially thanks to the work of ISSTIP and other similar societies, instrumentalists are learning how to prevent such problems and how to organise their stressful life.

Most doctors, therapists, teachers and all others involved in this field of research, recommend constant awareness of how the body functions and how it feels. Not only that pains and injuries can be avoided, but, what is extremely important, it opens many doors towards a fulfillment in our lives.

Our posture reflects our way of doing things and expressing ourselves. We communicate through words, but relevant studies have proved that only 7% of our communication skill

is verbal while 55% is expressed through our body responses, which psychologists term 'body language'. Words are mainly a product of our conscious mind and our vast unconscious mind manifests itself through our 'body language'. Our mind is, unfortunately, often crammed with negative patterns which are given additional strength by negative emotions. Many such negative emotions are manifested for various reasons: lack of confidence, fear of technically demanding passages, fear of memory slips, fear of being mocked or criticized, fear of expressing our innermost emotions, fear of failure. Fears produce negative tensions and instead of relaxing the body and letting go of the fears, performers often do the opposite. They try very hard to overcome this but then they become even more tense, the body is almost rigid and the breathing is impaired.

Focusing on liberating the neck helps us to recognize how to step out of this vicious circle, and how to bring about a balance between our body, mind and spirit and ultimately achieve freedom in our playing.

*In my experience both as a performer and teacher, I find that our wellbeing is determined by maintaining a 'free neck' throughout practising and, especially, in performance.*

To achieve this, one has to stop many times during practising, assess the state of the body and be aware of maintaining a 'free neck'. Eventually, through constant awareness, this can become 'second nature', a reflex action.

This is an advanced state of awareness and those who have achieved it will find that the moment the neck is not as free as it should they immediately revert to the well being of a free neck.

I am basing my studies on the work of F. Matthias Alexander, the founder of his now

highly popular 'Alexander Technique'. It has not only helped a number of musicians and other performers but many people with either physiological or psychological problems. Alexander emphasized the importance of the *free neck*, which gives support to our head, by holding it lightly and giving it the ability to move in different directions and to give the best feedback to our senses. When the head is in a 'balanced state', it gives the ability to the entire body to move and function freely and be most effective with the least effort. Alexander was so much aware of the important role of the neck in relation to the head that he called it '*primary control*'. His famous 'mantra' was:

*"Allow your neck to be free, to let the head go forward and up, to let the back lengthen and widen."*

Almost at the same time that Alexander developed his technique, several scientists came independently to similar conclusions when examining animals' behaviour. Horses, for example, can not stand up from the lying position if someone is holding their neck. After Alexander, some other relaxation techniques and methods also became popular amongst musicians and other performers, such as Feldenkrais, Grindea Technique and many study the Eastern disciplines like Yoga, Tai chi, Shiatsu, Meditation, etc.

In researches done with performers it has been proved that *the neck* is one of the most sensitive areas of our body. In a study of 100 musicians of international repute, published by Irene Samuel in her book '*Musical Maestros*', 38 of her interviewers claimed that 'tension in the neck' is a symptom of stage fright, and it is the second most often mentioned, the first one being 'yawning'- which many instrumentalists and particularly conductors find it embarrassing!

In another study of musicians who had to state whether they had any pain or injuries because

of their profession, 22% admitted problems with the neck in the first place.

In order to understand why this is so, we should take a closer examination of the neck and determine its special role in relation to our body.

The neck is a part of the spine which is the most crucial part of our skeleton. The spine is a protector of the spinal cord and all information is sent to and from the brain through the spinal cord. Our brain directs the entire activity of our body, by sending and receiving messages through the motor/sensory nerves which extend from each vertebrae. Each of the vertebrae provides support to the upper segments and transfers the weight to the lower segments to create the body balance. If this balance is disturbed, some of the ligaments and muscles which are attached to the vertebrae become weaker and others have to take their role to compensate, thus become overworked. This can lead to a damage to the inter-vertebral discs which function as cushions to protect the vertebrae and the nerves originating in each vertebrae. One of the worst conditions affecting instrumentalists is to have any damage of the nerve in the neck area (such as 'pinched nerve') because these nerves are connected with the head and also with the arms. 'Pinched nerves' in the neck area can cause a lot of pain in the shoulder, elbow and wrist, sometimes swelling of fingers, pins and needles in fingers, headaches, loss of balance, severe dizziness, and many other problems.

Therefore, it is most important for everyone's well being, not only for performers - musicians, actors, dancers - to acquire a correct posture with the body in a balanced state and, in particular, to achieve an alignment of neck, head and back. If this would be taught in primary schools where children are spending hours in front of their computers, misusing their bodies, young pupils would acquire a correct posture early in their life, thus many physical problems such as back

ache or tendinitis in the wrists and arms could be prevented.

This is even more important for us, pianists, if we become aware of the neck not only as a part of the spine but as the center point where the vertical gravity axis – the spine – and the horizontal axis – the shoulders and the arms, meet. The arms are not directly attached to the neck but are coordinated by some muscles which are attached to the neck. This is why it is so important to have not only the movements of the lower part of the spine in right correlation to the neck but also the movements of the arms. If the neck remains free of tension, all movements described above will be also free and executed with ease.

Here are a few exercises to develop an awareness of a free neck and of freedom of breathing in pianists; other instrumentalists like string players, guitarists show similar patterns wind; and brass players have to use their breath as their instrument but they can also benefit by learning relaxation techniques as recommended

1. Clenching of the jaw, tensing the lips or the face, rapid breathing, are symptoms very often observed in instrumentalists at various levels and are connected with stiffness of the neck. 'Letting go', relaxing the face and learning to breathe freely, using abdominal muscles, is one step towards a more relaxed playing.
2. Pianists, guitarists, string players, also tend to raise one or both shoulders which puts additional strain on the neck and hinders the freedom of movement of our arms. I would like to mention here that the position of the piano chair is important – not too low or too high, also not too close or not too far.
3. Many of the previously mentioned symptoms are due, to a great extent, to the incorrect position of the head in relation to the spine. If the head is pushed forward it affects the entire gravity system

just as if the back is not erect, upwards and the player stoops. Hence the importance of a correct posture before starting to play the instrument and learning to maintain it throughout playing. Any distortion of joints and muscles alters the natural position of the arms in relation to the body and the instrument and this means more pressure also on our neck.

What to do to avoid these negative tensions? First of all we have to recognize them and then learn how to cope with them and, especially, how to prevent them.

Whichever technique or method you will choose, it is your decision but you are then expected to work on it and practise it on a regular basis, and only then you will be able to recognize the tensions which are holding you back.

Finally, by freeing the body and mind of all negative tensions results in ease and joy in performance, the sounds produced are more beautiful and the music is communicated to our audiences. 'Freeing the neck' is our way of letting go of our fears and communicate with the others.

The Eastern philosophies teach us that in the front part of the neck, in our throat, there is a hidden energy centre, the *chakra of creativity and communication* and by exploring this knowledge the neck will play a most important role in releasing our full potentials.

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# Singing - a Product of the Body

Kaarina Ollila

*Singing is a product of the body and the body is the instrument of the singer. One is born with the voice, it is there from the beginning. The singer's psycho-physical instrument is constantly affected by one's life. One's voice is as personal and unique as one's fingerprint.*

How to help the student to find and control his own, unique instrument and to work on it by himself? We all have our individual personality with our own history and cultural background. This has a great influence on how we see and react to our environment, how we respond to other people and it also reflects on our ability and attitude to study and learn. The teacher's challenge is to find the best way to help the student on his level, taking into consideration his whole personality and trying to discover his own voice and its possibilities. The singer's instrument is a psycho-physical, holistic instrument in which the mind and the body are continually in dialogue.

*The teacher's task is to structure a frame of study based on the student's unique voice, his individual personality while taking into consideration the physical factors and laws that affect singing. The teacher's role is to give the information and the methods which would help a student, while the student's role is to practise the exercises shown by his teacher.*

During the many years I have been teaching singing I have studied various breathing exercises, some are based on exercises I learnt from my teachers in Vienna, and others I have developed myself after studying Yoga discipline and some stretching techniques which I found most beneficial for singers.

I have noticed that the breathing and stretching exercises I recommend, combined with the thorough study and understanding of the physical laws which affect the voice

greatly motivate the students from the very beginning of their training and they soon learn to work independently. The students become conscious of the physiological changes taking place in their body through practising the exercises, thus they are more inspired and motivated to do their work in a disciplined and organised way.

It is important that the exercises are done under careful control during the lessons and it is also very important to discuss the purpose of each exercise and what physiologically happens in the voice and in the body. In addition, I think it is vital that singers understand some basic rules of the anatomy and physiology of voice production, such as the function of diaphragm, the muscles used for breathing, air pressure, resonance etc.

When the foundation of the information is based on facts it helps the student to avoid frustration and the risks of repeating the same mistakes again and again. If the teaching is based only on imagery there is a risk of misunderstanding. There are important aspects for the students to study in depth: What happens physiologically in your body when you are breathing, starting the sound, supporting your voice? How do you feel it? How do you assess and verbalise these feelings? The answer to the last questions vary enormously between individuals. Information from these questions help the student for instance to listen to his own instrument when doing exercises that develop kinaesthetic sense. The enthusiasm to practise is

when students begin to understand their instrument, how it functions, what happens to the voice at various stages of their training, and how the voice is affected by uncontrolled breathing, their awareness of the physiological changes becomes more acute and the singing will not be so mysterious any more.

I recommend several exercises which improve your kinaesthetic sensibility, the body balance, its elasticity while strengthening certain muscles they also increase the condition of the body. To begin with, it is wise to start with simple exercises which help the student feel relaxed and be aware of the gentle breathing and the air flow moving through the body as in a relaxed body the natural breathing and the muscle balance is usually right and one feels at ease.

It is essential to be aware of free breathing. The connection between the voice and the breathing can also be observed when the singer experiences certain emotions, or different sensations such as smelling a flower, hearing someone humming, bursting with laughter. The world of singing does not seem too far away from our everyday life and you become aware of using your body to express certain ideas or emotions in a way that can benefit your singing.

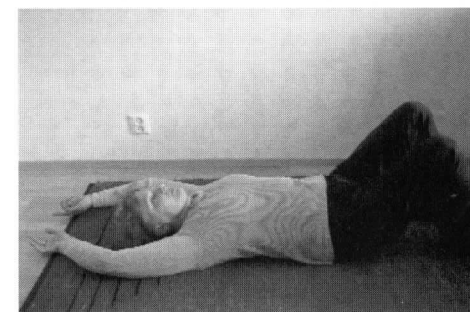
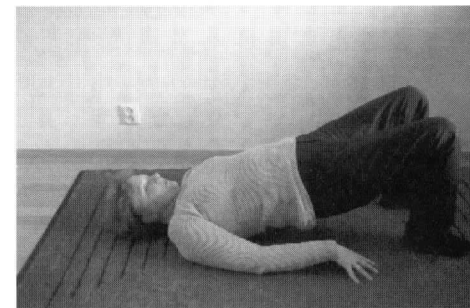
To breathe freely it is very important to have a good posture and a good alignment of the body, it releases the airflow and thus the voice. There are two places in the body which demand special attention. One is the area of the throat and the neck – the larynx- and the other is the alignment of the ribcage and the pelvis. A good alignment of this part of the spine gives the diaphragm the space to move downwards and upwards and allow the sounds to be initiated from the bottom of the pelvis.

Here are some of the exercises which I recommend:

*Exercise 1. To feel the natural breathing:*

Lie on the floor on your back, with the knees raised so that your feet are flat on the floor, and the hips are relaxed. Rotate your pelvis gently on the floor so that you will find the neutral position of the pelvis. Your back is resting on the floor, your spine is lengthened without forcing it.

Then raise your arms over your head and let them rest on the floor. Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth.



In the beginning keep the breathing very gentle, don't take too much air at a time.

Concentrate on feeling the core of the breathing inside your body: under your navel, against your spine, in your abdominal muscles and in the lower back muscles. You can feel your abdominal area raising and your back opening on the floor. In the beginning the breathing is gentle but give your airflow time to reach your abdominal area. Little by little stop longer time after breathing out, it allows the breathing to expand. The teacher must observe that the breathing should never be forced pushing the abdominal muscles downwards, neither should one take in too much air at a time. This creates hyper ventilation, stiffens the body which loses its elasticity.

*Exercise 2 - To develop the connection between resonance and breathing:*

This exercise helps you to find the released, automatic flow through the resonance area of the body: Sit, with a correct posture, with erect spine, feeling the weight of the body resting on your buttocks.

Close the right nostril with your thumb keeping the mouth closed. *Breathe in* through the left nostril then close that nostril with your forefinger and *breathe out* through the right nostril. Then *breathe in* through the right nostril and *breathe out* through the left one. Continue this exercise for a while, changing nostrils - closing and opening them with the thumb and forefinger.

In this exercise, let only a small amount of air flow out and in, at first. Be aware of the connection between the resonance area and the lower back muscles. Concentrate and feel what is happening inside your body. Increase gradually the amount of the air you take in by lengthening the time of breathing in, then increase the airflow (exhalation) through the sinuses, opening them by activating the cheek muscles when you breathe out. Be aware of a clear widening of sinuses area and the ease with which the air flows. After inhaling, take

a short rest and feel the connection between the resonance area - (the sinuses) and the expanded feeling in the lower part of the ribcage and the back muscles. You experience a feeling of opening and a lot of energy in the middle part of your body. The airflow has connected the resonance area to the area where the supporting muscles are.

*Exercise 3. Smelling a flower:*

Reflexive connection between resonance area and breathing.

This connection can be trained through an exercise that uses *the sense of smell*: Hold a flower in your hand, a fruit or some perfume - sniff three times through the nose and feel the smell spreading in your sinuses with the in-take of air as well as experiencing a slight reaction in the lower ribs. Inhale longer at the 3rd time, then hold your breath, when you will feel the rib cage opening more than previously.

*Exercise 4 Stretching the neck:*

Sit on a chair with your lower back straightened and the spine erect. Drop your head so that your chin touches slightly your chest. Open your mouth slightly so that your jaw is relaxed *Breathe out* through your mouth and allow the weight of your head to stretch the muscles at both sides of the spine. *Breathe in* through your nose and feel that the neck remains stretched while you do this exercise. Make sure that the head is kept in the same position and the spine is erect and lengthened, while the posture is maintained.

At the end of the exercise lift your head slowly and feel that your neck is lifted between your shoulder blades.

Finding this elastic alignment helps you to maintain a good posture without any tension.

*Exercise 5 Back Rolling on the floor:*

Lie on your back on the floor with bent, very relaxed knees. Place a small cushion under your head so that the spine is 'resting' on the floor.

*Breathe in* through your nose while lifting up your pelvis; *exhale* through your mouth, lowering your back very slowly, one vertebrae at a time.

If you feel any tension, e.g. between the shoulder blades or in the lower back, stop for a while. You may find that you cannot raise the pelvis with ease, at first, but through regular practice your muscles will warm up and the lifting and lowering of the pelvis will become more elastic. Exhaling at the right moments during the exercise results in greater elasticity in the movements.

You will find the right rhythm of your breathing and you will also feel that the rolling of your back opens and warms up the deeper muscles of your back. If in the beginning the exercise may appear difficult, I recommend that you rest while lying on the floor and take a few breaths before trying to do it again. This exercise is quite safe to practise, the massage of the muscles using your body weight is healthy and it is beneficial to all instrumentalists, not only to singers.

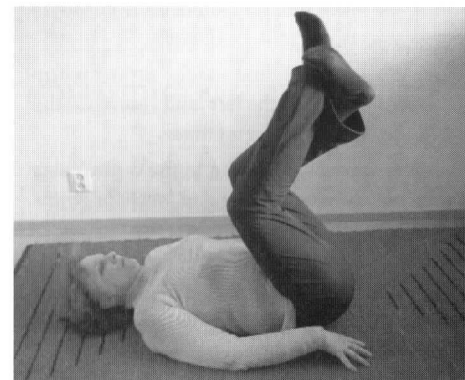
*Exercise 6. Massage of the lower back:*

Lie on your back on the floor, with bent knees over your stomach, then cross your feet and lift them towards the ceiling. The pelvis should rest on the floor all through the exercise.

a) do a little circle in the air with your toes while you are aware of your breathing, letting the air flow slowly in and out.

b) increase the size of the circle gradually

During this exercise you will be aware of the connection between your breathing and the whole area of the pelvis, your lower back and your buttocks.



This exercise is massaging this whole area which is often very difficult to get contact with.

*Exercise 7. Twisting the body:*

Stand up, with correct posture, with knees slightly bent and pelvis forward.

Cross hands on your chest (Indian position) without lifting shoulders. Keeping your pelvis forward, turn your torso (ribcage) to the right being aware of the muscles on the left side being stretched and active; then turn the torso to the left side observing that the muscles on the right side are stretched and active.



During the exercise, I recommend to breathe out through your mouth with small puffs

Twisting your body first to the right, return to the centre, then to the left and return to the centre, repeat this several times.

When the body is returning to the centre, stay in this position for a while and breathe in gently through your nose without drawing in much air.

This type of breathing while doing this particular exercise uses specific sets of muscles and helps develop the flexibility of your body.

A good posture and a balanced alignment, are the keys to finding the natural breathing by allowing the free airflow through your body and this is directly connected with the free voice. The singer's instrument has enormous possibilities which can be opened and developed through the right kind of teaching and training.

A good teacher will be careful not to impose a rigid method but try to adapt his teaching to the individuality of every student. When the singer discovers how the instrument works and what is needed to reach higher calibres of expression, he will know how to develop his voice independently of his teachers, he will know which exercises are most helpful to him by identifying his weak points or problems AND the good points in his training.

All the vocal qualities you are born with are there for you to find and develop.

## CONCLUSION

I would like to point out, in conclusion, how important it is for singers to realise what their voice needs, how to practise to develop it and which particular exercises are most helpful. Sometimes the mind and body need exercises for release of tension, or

stretching exercises, aerobic gymnastic, while at other times the voice just needs to rest.

*There is not one training method or exercise which would work always or with everyone.*

There cannot be just one pattern through which you go, day after day, regularly, like a slave. That's why it is good to give different variations of the exercises.

These exercises can be useful to other musicians too. They help to release the tensions in the body and develop the kinaesthetic sensibility. They can be used specifically for relaxation of body and mind and to develop your concentration – qualities greatly needed if one is to develop as a musician and an artist. There is no better and safer path to warm up before practising or performing, to calm body and mind and be ready for your creative work.

In this article I have introduced some ideas, suggestions and specific exercises on how a singer prepares himself and his voice for performance.

I think that singers should be aware of the importance of freedom of breathing during their studies and especially when they are in front of an audience. The impulse to the breathing is the vision and the breathing is always connected with the voice and with the musical phrase.

When he actually performs, his mind and body will be ready and while the mind is the 'leader', the artist hears the music in his imagination, in his 'inner hearing', he has a clear image, a vision of the sounds he wants to produce and he lets his voice go out and communicate his vision of the music to the audience.

# Pianist and conductor – two of a kind, or incompatible?

by Elin Persson

## Background:

*I was educated as pianist/piano pedagogue and conductor, and my main education was in Oslo Music Academy. In all my professional life I have tried to combine these two aspects of music making, and also constantly tried to further my studies and knowledge by attending different courses and masterclasses in both disciplines.*

I worked for 15 years as director of a middle sized Music-School in Norway. My responsibility was to conduct the choirs at several levels, to teach piano – individually and in piano ensembles -. I made sure that I had the time to play the piano myself, especially playing in Piano Ensembles which has been one of my favourite aspects of making music I give courses for teachers all over Norway and in neighbouring countries in piano pedagogy, conducting and in Piano Ensembles.

I studied in depth my two main interests – playing and conducting – looking at the similarities of the two skills then trying to combine them

thus enhancing the performances. I was constantly searching to find some answers to the questions such as: Which of my pianistic skills could be transferred to conducting? And how could a conductor's way of thinking help me as a pianist?

Fortunately for me I was offered a position as Head of Choir and Piano Dept in our Regional Opera (actually the oldest and second largest Opera House in Norway). This was just the job I was looking for where I could use my knowledge and experience. I have been working at this Opera House for the past five years and I still find it most valuable experience.

## My responsibilities are :

- To prepare choirs, and sometimes coach the soloists for their concerts or opera performances.
- To arrange/compose choirparts when they are not available from the editors.
- To conduct the choir in concerts or other performances, especially when teenage-singers are on stage.
- To play the keyboard parts in the orchestra when needed.
- To plan, set up and even play in chamber music recitals.
- To plan and set up masterclasses that can be included in our Annual Opera Festivals.
- To constantly look for new repertoire for our Operahouse.

## Which are the links between the two musical disciplines?

First of all is the understanding of the music. As a pianist, duopianist and accompanist I have an overview of the harmonic structure, not only the melodic one. As a conductor I must have this overview, to hear the entire score in my imagination. This is the aural aspect. It encompasses all aspects of vocal technique and interpretation and my job is to address each one of these.

Of greater interest for the readers, is *the physical aspect of this job*, the way I prepare myself to work both with my own body and with the choir.

Warming up before starting to practise or before a concert is most important;

- Raise your shoulders – hold, counting 3, then drop them, relaxed.
- Shake the relaxed arms,
- swinging them from the shoulders, with the thumbs pointing upwards, first slowly, gently then increasing speed and energy; your body should also be involved, moving gracefully.
- Raise your arms right up, over the head, stretch them to be in alignment with the whole body, then drop them, relaxed.
- Give the body extra energy with a 'bodywash', using your hands to rub arms, legs, back, the whole body. It improves the circulation and bring warmth to the whole body.
- Crawl (like babies), as an exercise for strengthening the muscles and the joints in the whole body.

When initiating vocal warm-ups for my choirs, I recommend *yawning* accompanied by lazy stretching of the arms and body. The singers are relaxed and are using the right muscles in the right way. This is a reflex action, bringing a connection between the group of muscles in the mouth, the throat, the diaphragm and the psoas (?) muscle. Similar reflex actions are sneezing, coughing, laughing. Singers call these reflexes 'the support', but I prefer to call them 'the balance' of the body.

By the way: Did you know that simply by raising from the chair, stretch out and smile, you activate 300 muscles in a positive way and increase your blood-circulation with 15%?

### There are three basic physical challenges for conductors:

- How to stand
- How to use the arms
- How to control the breathing

To find a correct and relaxed position when standing or when sitting down.

To acquire and maintain a good posture whether standing or sitting down, is essential, it gives a better balance and the breathing is free. (Grindea Technique) It is also 'energy saving', it avoids using too much force, thus prevents strain injuries to the body or the vocal chords.

I prefer to stand when conducting, especially during rehearsals and when I conduct vocal or instrumental ensembles in a concert. But when conducting Musical Theatre performances I use a high chair so that everyone can see me and my arm movements without disturbing the audience.

When standing, 'feel the ground', with the feet apart (app as wide as the hips); it is important to have a flexible and supportive feeling in knees, ankles and hips. (I often tell my students: 'Straight knees look good on flamingos, not on people!')

Healthy feet are a conductor's best friends. To keep them in a good shape we practise regular exercises:

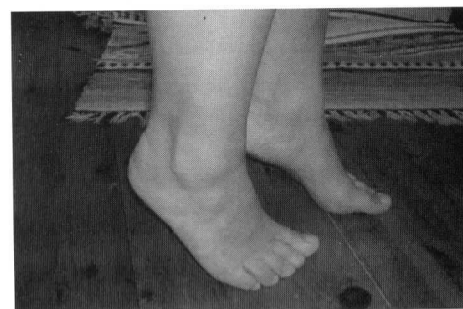
*Off with the shoes –light walking on the toes, light walking on the heels, light walking on the outside and then on the innerside of the feet.*

After a few minutes your feet will feel light, more flexible, warm and you will have new energy to continue standing while performing.

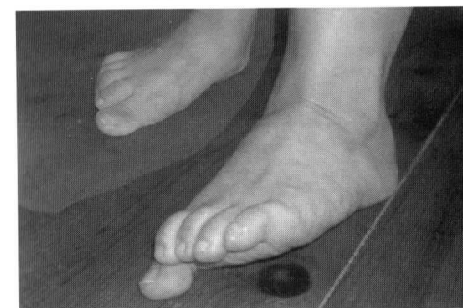
Most musicians find these exercises amusing, they laugh when doing it, but feel so much better afterwards.

Besides, laughter is good for your health.

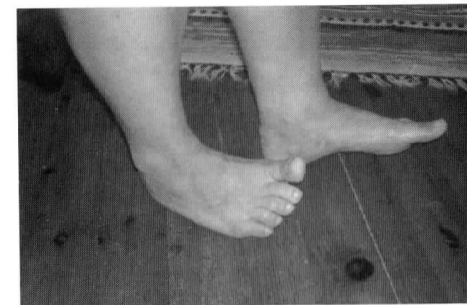
The right type of shoes should be used. If only musicians would realise how important shoes are, perhaps there will be fewer back or hips problems.



*Walking on the toes.*



*Walking on the inner side.*



*Walking on the heels.*



*Walking on the outer side.*

### Use the whole arm with free shoulders, elbows and flexible wrists

Do not raise the shoulders when playing or singing, it 'shortens' the neck and hinders the free flow of the voice.

The neck, shoulders, elbows and wrists should be totally liberated of any tension. Not only that this may cause pain but it also affects the quality of the sound. It also affects the conductor's free movements and sometimes his facial expression, and, obviously, the ensemble will respond. It is good to move when conducting – a stiff conductor creates stiff music. The body language is vital for communicating the soul of the music.

At the same time the conductor must give a clear, precise beat as, in my experience, singers do not keep time as strictly as instrumentalists and it is up to the conductor to hold the ensemble. Yet, the movements of the hands and arms are prompted by the music's

dynamics and nuances, thus they will vary from very small, gentle and light to most energetic ones – different styles demanding different approaches.

### c) Freedom of Breathing

In conducting, freedom of breathing has a double significance:

A natural, controlled but relaxed breathing is conducive to a better relationship between conductor and his choir or orchestra.

The conductor, especially a vocal conductor, very often seems to be an ideal for the choir, who, intuitively, acts like a mirror – the singers reacting to the slightest body or mind signals or changes.

In my work, if I hold my arms hanging a little lower, by the diaphragm, they are more relaxed, yet alert, the movements are freer and the singers also breathe more naturally and relaxed, producing a more beautiful and healthy sound without getting tired or stressed.

In contrast, if I conduct with my shoulders raised, the singers react, often they forget to focus on a low breath and end up producing a stressed tone devoid of a flowing musicality.

It is my job to start every vocal rehearsal with some exercises for the choirs, (as per above) but I am very careful to prepare my own performance as a conductor and as a pianist with some similar exercises.

Among them, to exhale 4-5 times, fast, (whispering Ha,Ha,Ha, Ha,Ha!) can provide new energy and inspiration. (Latin word 'inspiration' means to inhale. I've also found that warm-ups in minor keys and even modal keys helps the singers to sing more naturally and relaxed. Probably, because in those keys, they listen more intently to their own body and sound as well as to the sound of their colleagues.

I am using regularly, and I do recommend to my choir and to my students, *the Grindea Technique*, both before starting the rehearsal and, especially, before a performance. This takes only 2 or 3 minutes it brings stillness -

*After all, It is about making music, about using your body and mind in a perfect balance to achieve this. Also it is about sharing it with colleagues, students and with your audiences - which is most gratifying.*



*Don't tell me to relax.*

*It's only my TENSION  
that's holding me  
together!!*

both in the body, relaxing the diaphragm area through long, slow exhalation, the inhaling following automatically, and in the mind.

Exhaling normally is an active act, while inhaling normally is a passive one (reflex).

I cannot emphasise enough how necessary a healthy, natural' breathing is for singers while making music. The breathing will also influence - and be influenced by - the phrasing of the vocal music in relation to the text, *when* and *where* you stress each word and syllable in the phrase. Through a conscious study of the inflections of the voice as prompted by the text, the breath will flow more naturally.

Moreover, a correct and even placing of the consonants and the syllables in the mouth, will greatly improve the intonation of a choir.

#### **To sum up my experiences, thoughts and ideas,**

I want to point out that for me being a conductor and a pianist are two parallel ways of my life of a musician. I would not know which one to choose if I were forced to do so.

## Distance Learning for Focal Dystonia

John Sutton

*As a child I began piano studies and continued with them until the age of 14 when I made the decision pursuing sports and other life activities were more important. Five years ago at the age of 46 I made the commitment to return to piano playing with the goal of pursuing a degree at Arizona State University and becoming a piano teacher upon retirement from a career as a police officer.*

I began taking lessons from a graduate student and seriously studied with her for two years. During that time much preparation was made for an audition to the Music School at the university which included Mozart's Turkish March, Chopin's Prelude in E Flat Major and a Bach Fugue in G Major. I achieved limited success at the audition and qualified to study privately for university credit. Unfortunately, my skills weren't advanced enough to be accepted into the piano performance program.

During my second semester I began having a problem with the index finger of my right hand. It would curl towards the palm of my hand. It became most notable when playing single note passages both up and down the keyboard. I was also experiencing tightness and soreness in my forearms. The tip of my right index finger was sensitive to touch, especially the days immediately after practising when it was necessary to clip the fingernail. The condition produced similar problems when working at the computer which is a necessary function in my employment.

The hand condition severely hampered my ability to play. The piece that brought it to the forefront was during the time I was learning Mozart's Sonata in C Major. When I played the scale passage in the first movement which starts

on A and descends to G and so forth the right index finger would curl and block the thumb from crossing under the fingers to complete the upward scale movement. When playing the downward portion of the scale the same finger would curl and it took a total movement of the wrist and arm to cross over the thumb to complete the descending scale.

At first I did not realize how much I was playing on the tip of the right index finger. The discomfort that occurred from playing after trimming the nail created the need for me to observe closely what the problem was. I noticed the fingertip was dragging on the key each time the finger was used to strike a key. When striking a black key the curling in the finger created a situation where just the very end of the black key would be touched providing the finger was even able to extend enough to even strike the key.

I attempted to play through the condition for almost a year while I searched for answers. Several piano teachers I talked with had no experience in this area. A hand specialist did not know what the problem was. A course in the Alexander Technique, which proved beneficial for my spine, didn't help the hand. Chiropractic treatment and massage therapy were also great for other conditions, but not the

hand. Not playing for several months did not cause an improvement.

I did a web search and found information on a link which focused on musicians injuries. I read Jonas Sen's research paper "Playing the Piano – Playing with Fire" (dissertation for MA.Perf. City University, London) and knew right away I had the same hand problem he had experienced. An e-mail to him resulted in his suggestion to contact Carola Grindea who had previously helped him.

I then contacted Carola and purchased the videos she had produced on focal dystonia. Obtaining the videos was the first step in helping to turn around my hand condition. If I had to identify what was the number one influence after watching the tape and reading the manual I'd have to say it was raising my awareness. Prior to this I gave no thought to how I played. I just went after the notes without any thought other than appropriate fingering and many times inappropriate fingering.

*This sense of awareness did not develop overnight or simply with one viewing or reading.*

The very first step I took was to focus on playing with flat fingers, caressing the keys with the pads of the fingers, using the downward motion of the wrist during the key stroke and releasing the key with the upward movement of the wrist. I watched the hands of Carola's students as they played their demonstration pieces and realized I was playing with very stiff forearms, stiff wrists and curved fingers. This was right in line with Carola's experience of many players with this affliction who played with curved fingers. Right away I felt the difference in this technique and within the first attempts recognized I could play without the index finger curling. It didn't stop the tension I experienced in the finger, but as long as the finger was straight it didn't curl. I don't want to create the impression that I immediately started playing with success. That is not the case at all. I could only play at an extremely slow speed.

However it was a move in the right direction. As Carola instructed, development of the technique required me to play slowly and at the pianissimo level using the downward motion of the wrist to play the note and the upward motion of the wrist to release the tension and prepare for the next note.

My sense of awareness was reflected in the way I observed other pianists hands and fingers when they played. I remember seeing a biography on Neil Sedaka, one of our pop artists. He had studied classical music and there was film footage showing him play a piece which required considerable dexterity. I noticed his fingers appeared so flat that it seemed the tips curled upwards when he played. This observation helped me to believe I could do the same as I was experiencing a lack of self-discipline in keeping my fingers flat because of the difficulty in transition from curved to flat. I saw an elderly female pianist playing Dixieland jazz and noticed she also played with very flat fingers but also used her wrists in the downward motion with each chord while playing in the rhythm section of her band. Before moving on to the next chord she released the keys with an upward motion of the wrist. Her playing appeared to effortless and it prompted another level of awareness for me because playing the piano, for me, always seemed difficult and I realized again I was playing with extreme tension.

Focal dystonia was described on the tape as a neuro/muscular condition which could also create psychological problems for the pianist. I found this to be very true. I was devastated and I am not even a professional. I had lost hope because everything I tried was unsuccessful. I was ready to give up some days; other days I would compromise and settle for perhaps just studying left hand only pieces. I used to reflect on how Leon Fleischer must have felt when his problem developed. For that reason I would not give up completely even if I could only play with my left hand. A few months ago I was able to buy his new CD entitled "Two Hands." It was a morale boost for me.

I did not realize the importance of posture at the piano until I was able to see some pictures my wife took while I was playing. I immediately observed I hunched at the shoulders and leaned forward with my torso towards the keyboard. My forearms were held high and tense. I engaged in many measures to deal with my tension but it took the instructional tape to realize what tension was. When you live with it, it becomes the norm and you don't even know you are tense until it manifests itself into some type of negative condition.

The exercises involving the shoulders and stretching of the lower back demonstrated on the tape did not seem to be enough for me. I've always been athletic and thought I needed to do more stretching than just the two exercises presented. I developed a daily 20 minute stretching routine incorporating Carola's exercises as well as those I obtained from a physical therapist, chiropractor and massage therapist. I focused on my spine using techniques learned in a basic Alexander's class I took at ASU. I was able to get an ergonomic computer keyboard and work station for my job. As a police commander I spend a lot of time at the computer.

*The results have benefited my health as I don't experience the amount of back pain I used to and I am conscious of my posture which is reflected while standing and sitting.*

Carola talks about the importance of approaching the instrument, being free of tension and using the arm weight. Again, I was able to obtain a sense of awareness I previously did not have. I noticed that I would get so tense, my spine would twist to the left side when playing difficult passages of mostly single note runs up the keyboard. I would also stop breathing. At my current stage of progress I am still playing with tension and this seems to be the most difficult part of the improvement

process. I don't have the tools, expertise or observation skills to identify the source of my tension. I do know that the right side of my body does not move as freely as the left side and it seems to be originating in the shoulder and upper arm. I also have observed that my right wrist does not move as freely from side to side as the left and bringing the right thumb under the fingers to move up the keyboard is not as smooth as the left hand. I am hoping to make a trip to Carola's studio in the future and do some intensive work with her that goes beyond what I have been able to learn from her video.

I work every day with scales to reinforce the downward and upward motion of the wrist one note at a time. This has required for me to be more patient, a trait that has not been a personal strength. To help myself deal with the patience I have taken some of the difficult passages from various pieces and made them into exercises. This has helped to break the monotony of scales, thirds, fifths, sixths and octaves and provided me with a sense of some sort of repertoire progress. Patience had to be a real key to any success. The passages have to be played over and over again focusing on all the elements of the Grindea Technique.

*The good news is it works and what previously had been unplayable is now becoming more comfortable.*

The progress takes time and the improvement is often subtle, but I can feel it through the ease of doing what could not be done before. The improvement has served as an inspiration to continue and not give up.

I've estimated my condition has improved 50% by now. My benchmark has always been Mozart's Sonata in C major. My thumb does not collide with the index finger when going up the scale. I no longer experience pain in my forearms. My index finger for the most part strikes the key with the pad and does not drag across the key. My spine does not twist and I no

longer stop breathing in anticipation of the ascending and descending runs. In addition, other pieces such as the Mozart's Turkish March are coming back. There was a time when I could not perform the opening motif which required the thumb to cross under the palm of the hand to get the fourth note in the 5 note motif. My mind is not focused exclusively on the hand while playing as it used to be and instead is concentrating on making music. That has been extremely valuable in helping me listen, relax and enjoy the sounds.

I still experience a downward pull in the finger and certain movements exacerbate the pull. Of interest is playing the A major or D major scale. For some reason the finger movement between b natural and c # or e natural and f # are just not cooperating as much. And ascending scales are more challenging than descending scales. The descending runs are almost not a problem any more.

Even while writing this article and exchanging email with Carola I continue to learn. I overlooked some written directions in the Grindea Technique pamphlet which carefully explained the best way to cross the thumb under the hand in ascending passages. Carola offered advice to me by e-mail based on a series of questions I asked her. She said when practicing scales to be sure and bring the thumb under the hand to allow the thumb to be resting on the next key at the same time the third finger is stroking a key. In other words, prepare to play the next note *simultaneously* with the stroking of the previous note. When she wrote that advice I immediately remembered it was in the handbook but the importance of it had not registered until that moment. The same day I received the advice, I started practicing the new technique. My old technique was obviously inefficient as I was not bringing the thumb under the hand until after the key was played by the third finger. Playing in that manner created a very long movement of the thumb which I now recognize would be a severe impediment to playing fast passages. This

experience helped to solidify the idea that if possible the student should have access to a teacher as there will be certain limitations that can be expected by a person who attempts to do everything alone.

I truly hope this article is helpful. I never realized until this happened to me how many others have had the same condition and how few people know anything about it. I was afraid to tell my College piano teacher what the problem was for fear of being removed from the program. As it turned out, I had to leave the program anyway.

If I had to do all over again I would look for help as soon as the problem surfaced and perhaps I would have found a teacher who was more experienced in this area. In fact, being athletic I should have known that the condition was a signal that something was wrong.

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# My 'Conversion Experience' With Arm Weight

Alan Fraser

*I first met Carola Grindea at a conference on Medicine and Musicians at King's College London in November 2002. She was demonstrating how her approach could help focal dystonia and other pianistic ailments; I was presenting my book, The Craft of Piano Playing which in part applies some principles of Feldenkrais Method to piano technique.*

I watched as she had us raise our arms high in the air, then let them flop to see how much more relaxed our shoulders could become. I said to myself, "I went through a very involved four-year intensive training in Feldenkrais Method only to find out it's this simple???" Then I watched a similar, flopping technique, used to release tension in the pianist's wrist. I saw the informative value of such a practice technique, but also felt that you can't actually play like that, there has to be some control factor involved! In short, I was sceptical to say the least...

In my own talk I spoke of the structuro-functional aspects of the hand, using the metaphor of the hand as a mini-pelvis, the fingers legs, the forearm a breathing, moveable spine. I mentioned how important it is that skeletal structure bears the considerable forces that pass through the hand in piano playing, freeing the muscles for finer control and liberating them from the dangers of inflammation through overwork.

*I spoke of the insidious dangers of the arm weight technique: its misapplication often leads to the collapse of the hand's structure and a subsequent increase in the very tension it aims to remedy.* Carola rather bristled at this, and in a fairly heated exchange we both stuck to our guns, she defending her wrist flop and I insisting that it could only be a didactic technique and not usable in actual playing.

I felt badly afterwards that we had had what amounted to a public quarrel; on the other hand I admired her for her spunk, and was happy that we both felt free to discuss the issues in a real way rather than simply patting each other on the back. It is only through a healthy airing of differences in opinion that we might in the end come to a more complete understanding of the whole.

Then in 2004 I mentioned again the hidden dangers of arm weight in a submission to the U.K. Piano Teachers Newsletter, a weekly email that goes to hundreds of piano teachers in the U.K. and worldwide. This time it was Raymond Banning that rose to arm weight's defense, and I responded trying to clarify what I had said (U.K. Piano Teachers Newsletters #285, #286, #290 Part 2, #291, #293). By the time his next response appeared, I had become fascinated enough to take a new look at the whole issue, and I decided that perhaps I had been unwise to dismiss arm weight out of hand. I started trying to practice using arm weight, and lo and behold, things got better!

I noticed that by trying to play a note using the weight of my arm, I achieved precisely the kind of relaxation needed for me to feel my skeletal alignments exactly, and to have my bones take over the larger part of the work. Thus by using arm weight I succeeded in practicing what I myself preach, and much better than I had before! I was so impressed with this that I

decided to "get it from the horse's mouth" and on my next visit to London, I went to see Carola. She put me through my paces, a rigorous series of exercises to free the hand, wrist, forearm, upper arm, shoulder and back, which, although they may seem a lot less sophisticated than a Feldenkrais or Alexander lesson, actually address the same functions that those others do in a profound and effective way. A small part of me was screaming inwardly,

*"This can't be useful, it goes against everything I know!" But by this time a much larger part was saying, "Alan, after all you've achieved, you still don't play as well as you would like to, so why don't you just go with this..."*

It was a strange experience: I knew that if I really let my arm weight flop totally, my hand would either mash a bunch of keys in a very un-artistic manner or simply fall to my side. However, when I surrendered myself to the experience of letting just that happen, and then simply reserved a small portion of my attention to somehow, even in this weird, for me hyper-let-go state, actually play a note, I discovered a sense of connection and fine control and wonderful, blossoming velvet tone, a kind of relaxation that didn't turn me into a formless blob but made me more capable.

Carola also brought my posture and breathing into the picture, and I was aware that her eagle-like perception was dealing with my particular body and perceptive organization: she wasn't just spouting the dogma of arm weight but addressing the particular issues relevant to my own playing.

I had two more powerful lessons with Carola before returning home to ruminate on these intense new experiences. Remember, having developed a new approach to piano technique myself, authored a fairly involved book about it, and having taught it with great success to a

large body of pianists on several continents, I might well have been justified in maintaining my own point of view. But I was fascinated, and as Moshe Feldenkrais says, there is no limit to improvement. I had some recitals coming up and I assiduously applied these newly acquired ways of thinking and sensing to my program.

The first recital was a combination of success and disaster. All the slower moving, lyrical, delicate material had very fine tone and colour; I sensed more ease in what I was doing, was happier with my sound and also with my sense of personal involvement, of spontaneity and emotional expression. But then came the technically demanding material – the Liszt B minor Ballade and the Rachmaninoff B flat minor Sonata. Here my fingers felt like putty, like limp dishrags – they simply would not move, they wouldn't respond to the situation! I was relying too much on arm weight to move them – my big, cumbersome arm simply could not activate them to the speed and extent they needed. Somehow I got through, but this certainly meant going back to the drawing board once again.

I realized that I couldn't just swallow this new technique whole and apply it blindly across the board. I returned to standing on my structure, giving myself a sense of absolutely secure skeletal connection coupled with a clear sense of the muscular effort required to either clamp the bones of my finger to the key or move my finger vigorously into the key. When I then suffused this basic level of practice with the new sensations I had gained from Carola's demonstration of arm weight, I arrived at what I felt to be a more effective synthesis of these various strands of thought. And yes, if you were wondering, the next recitals did go better.

There are many important things to be learned from this experience. Perhaps most important, dialogue is always more useful than standoff and confrontation. There is often a surprising amount to be learned from our so-called 'adversaries,' and no system is so good that it can't be improved upon. The sense of artistic

search, the dedication to that elusive quality we call perfection, so easy to conceive yet impossible to reach, is what can transform us from adversaries into colleagues who truly work together towards the advancement of our common Art.

Then there is the question of Tradition. Most traditions exist because they are founded on something of real value. Often traditions are maligned as being out of date and empty, but if they had been empty they never would have become traditions in the first place. If the precepts of a tradition are followed mechanically, it can appear to become empty and lifeless, but if you engage with those precepts in a speculative, investigative way, you are bound to find riches therein.

I feel rather proud that I have forged a new

approach that many say has real value and fills in some missing links in our understanding of piano technique. But I am also grateful that I could learn something of tremendous value from someone who has forged her own synthesis between personal insights and one of the great traditions in piano pedagogy and technique, and thus to fill in a missing link in my own understanding.

**Alan Fraser** is a pianist and Feldenkrais practitioner teaching at the Art Academy of the University of Novi Sad, Serbia & Montenegro. His book, *The Craft of Piano Playing: A New Approach to Piano Technique*, is published by Scarecrow Press. You can visit his website at <http://alanfraser.faithweb.com>.



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# A New Sort of Medicine

Dr Michael Lasserson

*Tuesday night. Quickly, home from the surgery. Family greetings, warm and loving as always - but, perhaps just a tad perfunctory. Supper eaten quickly, and then change into casual clothing. Pull the bass out from under the piano, and manoeuvre it into its cover. Pack in bow, rosin, electronic tuner, pencil, music - still closed, still on the stand where it was placed after the last rehearsal with all sorts of resolutions about practising the impossible bits in the scherzo. And fold the stand up, checking - before packing it - that it is the one with all the screws present. Then, switch off mobile; hoist bass cover on to shoulder; pick up chair, and out to the car - with farewells almost as perfunctory as were the greetings earlier. The family, left behind, settles down to washing-up, homework, and bed. Tonight is rehearsal night, important and exciting, for the local amateur orchestra. The symphony orchestra!*

Each week, as many as fifty dedicated amateur musicians meet in a local church hall and hurl themselves against the awe-inspiring heights of the symphonic repertoire as they do battle against Beethoven, Bruckner, Mahler, and others. For some it is a reunion, for others an opportunity to realise a fantasy, - that of playing, and of being part of, great music that has in turn been part of them as long as they can remember. The concentration is intense, the energy expenditure phenomenal and there is, just occasionally, a price to be paid for such all this effort. The striving for effect can bring with it problems of pain and strain after three hours of such hard work, but - well, there is the week to recover and, in any case, job pressures mean that you wouldn't have time to practise anyway - so you can take a break. And there's always a bit of Movelat to rub on, and perhaps a couple of Ibuprofens to take and a couple of codeines - and, come the next rehearsal, off you go again.

*Thus the dedicated amateur, able to pick and choose what to play and when to play it.  
But, the professional?*

Very different, often tragically so. The aphorism "A musician is a goal-orientated individual who feels that his art takes precedence over his physical condition" is dreadfully true. Long years of intensive practice, the urge to get into the profession, the horrendous work schedule - all these lead to the insidious development of bad habits leading to musculo-skeletal malfunction and chronic pain syndromes which, up to a point, can be handled with highly personal tricks of technique and posture. The problem is that, when such disorders are recognised, they may be almost too deeply entrenched to respond to treatment. The seeds of such problems were sown, often, in the very early years at a time when there would have been a window of opportunity to correct,

before patterns began to set. But, often, such opportunities were missed in the juvenile excitement of music making, when talent plus such excitement propelled so many inexorably towards a career in music. But what of these unfortunate professionals? The giants, as well as the rank and file, are affected and many - like the pianists Leon Fleisher, Gary Graffman, and Michel Béroff - have gone public about disabilities, such as focal dystonia, which have taken years out of their careers.

*Think again, though, about the rank-and-file player. He has invested years of hard work to get into the profession; he may be married with children; he knows no other skill; he may be frightened of admitting this steadily encroaching disability for, in so doing, he puts his place and his livelihood is at risk. For the freelance, those who do not play do not eat.*

The knowledge-base of Performing Arts Medicine has long gone past the essentially sterile debate of "Over-Use versus Mis-Use", when treatments ran the gamut of rest, physiotherapy, analgesics, anti-inflammatories, tranquillisers, beta-blockers, and (occasionally) surgery, with - all too frequently - unhappy results. But now, the subject has emerged as one of the disciplines of medicine, with a rapidly expanding literature, covering such disorders as carpal tunnel syndrome, focal dystonia, postural disorders, and stage fright. There is now a far more holistic approach to the patient so that the case is not one of a painful hand or joint attached to a musician, but rather that of a person in pain with multifactorial problems - physical, emotional, environmental - requiring a truly multidisciplinary approach. More and more, surgery is a last resort, with treatment taking the form of slow and meticulous rehabilitation and re-programming. The major

orchestras and music colleges have woken up to such problems with the appointment of medical advisers, many of whom are general practitioners, and performing arts therapists. Also, there are now well established Performing Arts Medicine Clinics such as that run by the International Society for the Study of Tension in Performance (ISSTIP), which has already trained several doctors and musicians to work in this field and which is soon to establish an Institute of Performing Arts Medicine, based at the London College of Music, which will offer investigation and treatment as well as training programmes. The long-term aim, of course, is to encourage awareness and understanding of these problems among players and teachers so as to identify and treat them as early as possible, in addition to ensuring that the window of opportunity allows identification and eradication of bad habits in the young player together with questioning the choice of instrument if necessary. These problems and their treatment are the province of the specialist, but increasingly, the general practitioner is likely to see them first and will need such specialist back-up.

*But, for the amateur? Next week, we do Beethoven Seven. Or is it Bruckner Seven? Huge, exhausting, exhilarating. And we can always rest between rehearsals!*

# Reviews

## BOOK REVIEWS

### "Children on Wings" – Johanna Maria Roels Metropolis

ISBN 90-807186-1-0

<[www.metropolis-music.com](http://www.metropolis-music.com)>

This can only be but a cursory review, since the book is in Dutch and I had to rely on the translated summaries provided.

It is a beautifully presented and colourful book that juxtaposes children's drawings with the musical scores spawned from these visual or narrative examples. Without the benefit of full translation it is not easy to perceive the precise teaching 'method' that leads the child through this process. Many of the resulting scores seem somewhat complex and it is not clear as to the extent of the child's cognitive input.

The major concern of the book is to *allow the fantastic to lead the cognitive*. For adults, with our considerable historical and intellectual baggage, this can be quite a challenge. We are more used to the maxim 'start with the known and proceed to the unknown', whereas this method (at least for us) would seem to turn that on its head.

Children seem to fare better than adults when the methods is addressed their imagination. The highly imaginative and sensitive response, both musically and in their illustrations are proof of their response to this approach.

This approach has been also the basis of *We Make Our Own Music* by Carola Grindea which has inspired Johanna Roel to develop her own ideas.

The book is not designed as a teaching tool *per se*, but rather presents, I think, a summary of what can be achieved by allowing the child's imagination and creativity to lead the learning process.

A further publication is planned entitled "*Children's Inventions*" which promises to enlighten us further on using improvisation and composition at the piano. What is clear is that Roels has researched this field exhaustively and has come up with both practical and philosophical ideas that should prove inspiring to any teacher. Let us hope that both the present book and the imminent sequel will soon be available in English editions.

Paul Lanfear

### The Disciplines of Vocal Pedagogy: Towards an Holistic Approach by Dr Karen Sell Ashgate £47.50

ISBN No 0 7546 5169 X

Dr Karen Sell's 'Magnum Opus' is a most valuable study not only for professional or amateur singers and for voice teachers but also for other performers and music educationalists.

Dr Sell presents an overview of the different approaches to vocal pedagogy from the ancient world to the present day, discussing the ethics, the psychology and the science of vocal techniques and performance.

She emphasises the importance of a holistic, multi-disciplinary approach which she uses successfully both in her teaching and in her performances.

This scholarly volume should be on the shelves of every singer and voice teacher and is a must for the libraries of all Music Colleges and Conservatoires.

We hope that a paper back edition may also be published which will be less costly for the many impecunious musicians.

Carola Grindea

## VIDEO/DVD REVIEW

### Yoga For Musicians (VIDEO or DVD, 2004) by Penelope Roskell

This is a very important publication, organised and produced by Penelope Roskell, who is both a professional concert pianist and professor of piano at Trinity College of Music. Her experience of yoga over many years has been intelligently applied here to the particular needs of musicians. The video also features Catherine Nelson, a yoga instructor with a special interest in teaching yoga to musicians. She gives a demonstration of classic yoga poses in the second half of the video, including the Sun Salutation sequence. As Penelope points out in her guiding narration, one needs to regard these as idealised demonstrations and not attempt to match Catherine's suppleness, which is acquired only through many years' practice. For those with prior yoga experience, another point to note is

the absence of 'inverted postures' - such as headstand or shoulderstand - which risk damaging the neck if practised incorrectly.

To compliment the static nature of the yoga, the first half of the video focuses more on movement, using a variety of exercises derived from Dalcroze and Tai Chi. These are very clearly demonstrated by students from Trinity College of Music and their benefits in terms of performing on one's instrument are well explained. Penelope herself demonstrates how freeing the arm transforms one's performance at the piano.

It cannot be overstated how vital a need this video serves. Professionally filmed in an attractive setting, it is also available in DVD format. Highly recommended.

Paul Lanfear

Available from Penelope Roskell,  
66 Queen Elizabeth's Walk,  
London N16 5UQ  
email: [peneloperoskell@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:peneloperoskell@yahoo.co.uk)



### Peter Feuchtwanger - Piano Exercises

for Curing Playing Related Disorders and for Acquiring a Functional and Natural Approach to Piano Playing  
Book and Video

On the video you can see a lecture by Peter Feuchtwanger about the genesis of his Piano Exercises. To follow this introduction, Peter Feuchtwanger explains each of his eighteen Piano Exercises, while Frederik Malmqvist demonstrates each of them. At the end of the video some examples of fingerings and their technical execution is shown. Frederik Malmqvist also performs a composition by Peter Feuchtwanger, which demonstrates the techniques which can be learned from these Piano Exercises. The duration time of the video is 64 minutes. The video, which is available as DVD or PAL-VHS-Cassette, was produced by Stuart Monroe (London) and is in English.

The German Book comprising 132 Pages, with many articles and photos of great singers and pianists which have never been published before, is available together with the video! The Book comprises the complete Piano Exercises, which are explained in detail by three assistants of Peter Feuchtwanger. It also includes instructions how to teach these exercises to children. The video and the book can not be purchased separately. The price is 65,- € + costs of shipment. The english Translation of the Book is in Preparation and will be available in Spring 2006.

To order send an Email to [blido@t-online.de](mailto:blido@t-online.de) or visit the website [www.peter-feuchtwanger.de](http://www.peter-feuchtwanger.de) or send a postcard to: Stefan Bildo, Gustav-Freytag-Str. 47, D-97877 Wertheim, Germany.

For further informations see: [www.peter-feuchtwanger.de](http://www.peter-feuchtwanger.de)